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KATE
A COMEDY
BY
BRONSON HOWARD

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KATE
A COMEDY IN FOUR
ACTS

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A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS
BY
BRONSON HOWARD



KING HENRY . . . THANK LOVE FOR MY
BLINDNESS . . . SHALL KATE BE MY WIFE?
—HENRY V, v. 2



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MCMVI

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NOTE

EXCEPTING the word "Act," which seems as clear and as familiar as any other word that could be used for the purpose, all the technicalities of the stage are utterly ignored in this comedy as here printed; and even the names of the speakers are not constantly repeated as heretofore thought necessary in all dramatic publications. Their continual and useless repetition, wearying to the eye and a bar to the natural movement of thought, is no more necessary to the reader of a play than to the reader of the occasional dialogues in a novel. So far as the mere form of the play is concerned the author wishes if possible to carry the imagination directly to scenes of real life and not to the stage. To ask a man sitting in a library first to imagine himself in a theatre, then to imagine himself somewhere else, is to obscure if not destroy the true dramatic effect of what he reads. We make every

NOTE

possible effort to conceal stage technicalities from the spectator in a theatre, and the speakers are not labelled. We know these things only at rehearsal and in the "prompt book"; why should they be forced on one who is reading a play instead of seeing it performed?

ACT FIRST
WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

ACT SECOND
LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

ACT THIRD
STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

ACT FOURTH
WHICH WOULD BE A WIFE?

CHARACTERS

KATE HARDENBECK. BIANCA DUNN.
THE HON. DOROTHEA CATHERST.

THE REV. LORD JOHN VERNOR.
ARCHIBALD PENGREU, EARL CATHERST.
THE REV. EDWARD LYELL.

ERASTUS G. HARDENBECK.
FRANKLIN TENBROECK.
THE DUKE OF MAINWARTON.
SCOTCHBURN ANCOTT.
CAPT. LORD FFOLLIET PENGREU.
DE PEYSTER WOLFE.

LADY ST. JOHN-GLYN.
THE DUCHESS OF MAINWARTON.

PEELER DIMPS. MRS. JANE DUNN.
NESBITT. WATTMAN. BAILEY.
REGINALD. HERBERT.

PLACES AND TIME

A LARGE part of the comedy passes in or near a village in Buckinghamshire, England, during September, 1905; at the Rectory and at Throckmonck Hall. The play ends in a residence on Fifth Avenue, New York, opposite Central Park, in June, 1906.

Buckinghamshire is a few miles from London, to the northwest, beyond Harrow-on-Hill; richly luxuriant in foliage, pasture, farm-lands and gardens. In the undulating valleys among the Chiltern Hills and their smaller companion ranges there are many beautiful private parks, surrounding the mansions of old families. One of the villages in this county is Chalfont St. Giles, where Milton finished *Paradise Lost*; and a little further southward is the "country church-yard" of Gray's *Elegy*, at Stoke Poges; with its ancient tombs and ewe-tree lying closely between church and parsonage.

Some of the names, local and personal, are spelled in the dialogue as they are to be pronounced; not as printed elsewhere.

ACT I
—
WHEN MARRIAGE
IS A FARCE

ACT FIRST

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

"**I** THINK this is the book you asked me to find for you, Mr. Lyell."

"Thank you, Wattman:—*The Holy Church in its Relation to Marriage—Volume Third*; yes—this is the one I meant. Lord John hasn't returned yet?"

"No, sir; he went out for his golf this morning, as I told you, and he's still on the links I suppose. I—I'm very glad you have come back to your regular work in the parish as curate, Mr. Lyell."

"I hoped to return some weeks ago, before the arrival of our new rector, but affairs at our mission chapel compelled me to remain there. You have seemed a little troubled at something, Wattman, ever since I reached the parsonage an hour ago."

"If I may be permitted to say so, the Reverend Lord John Vernor needs an exper-

KATE : A COMEDY

ienced curate, sir, and—if I may take the liberty—he—he needs one constantly at his side. Lord John's valet, Mr. Nesbitt, is as anxious about it as I am, sir. We both reminded his lordship that it was St. Lambert's Day, when he started for the links, and the service at a quarter before twelve. There isn't much more than time now for Mr. Nesbit to change him. One day, Lord John was obliged to hurry into the chancel with his golf-suit underneath his robes, sir."

"Indeed!"

"And—I am very sorry to say it, sir—
—but our—our new rector sometimes forgets
the—he—he forgets the service entirely
now and then."

"He forgets divine service?—in the Church
of God! The Rector of Pengrue-Catherst!"

The Reverend Edward Lyell looks very serious; and the little gray-haired man standing near his chair is equally serious, but showing the reverent bewilderment of an old servant in the Rectory, rather than the offended dignity of a clergyman. The two men are silent for a moment; both shocked.

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

Mr. Lyell is a man of about thirty-five years or a little less, with a strong, handsome face and an accurately cut profile; clean-shaven, of course. He is professionally "Reverend" in every line of his features, his figure and his costume; in every attitude and every movement; but there is also deep sincerity in the calm outlook of his eye. He belongs to that class of truly religious men whose intellectual power, firmness of purpose and absolute honesty have encouraged other men to martyrdom in all ages; they remain on earth themselves and in good health to look after the interests of the Church.

The old servant and the young clergyman are in the rectory of a rural church in the village of Pengrue-Catherst. Through open doors and through the small panes of horizontal windows there is seen the glimmer of sunshine on trees, old tombs and rich lawn-grass; also on flowers, growing here and there; irregular, as if almost accidental. It is a curious mixture of churchyard and home-garden which seems to preserve the ancient dead as inmates of the living domestic

KATE : A COMEDY

circle. Beyond this meeting-place of many generations, past and present, the heavy walls of the village church loom up with windows of various Gothic; evidently rebuilt from time to time in utter indifference to preceding forms of architecture; but now so covered by Nature that her mosses and lichens and ivy give her own unity of design to the conflicting arts of men.

The interior of the rectory indicates almost as many past generations in the perverse obstinacy of its lines as do the Gothic eccentricities of the old church or the dates on the tombstones. If there are any artistic discussions in the shadowy under-village of an English rural churchyard the elder ghosts must constantly ask the younger ones, each in his due succession, why they never had any respect for the architectural plans and esthetic intentions of their forefathers. A heavy beam extends across the apartment marking the original height of the ceiling; but when a new incumbent, perhaps in the recent times of Queen Anne, desired a larger room he simply threw in a pillar or two for support and the additional

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

space shot abruptly upward from this huge beam to a higher ceiling, leaving the old room itself a mere alcove, unaltered and unadapted; nor do the added walls conform with it in any way, woodwork or decoration. Another ancient room wanders off on one side with the same old floor, level with the outer lawn, and the same small panes in horizontal windows, affording still other glimpses of the trees and the church. On the opposite side of the room however some new rector apparently wished to get further away from the ground with another wing; so a platform and balustrade and a few well-worn steps stand boldly out into the main apartment, a corner of the lower step being cut off, as the afterthought of a still later resident, to let the outer door swing open properly. In rebuilding or altering, whatever occurred to anyone's fancy was always the next thing done, and the final result of all this time-honored chaos is exquisite beauty. There are a few convenient books on shelves of blackened oak; also a desk, of merely incidental use to-day, with the most modern of modern stationery implements, but sacred

KATE : A COMEDY

in previous centuries to quill-pens and to ponderous theological sermon-writing. A number of new sermons lie on the ancient desk now; one was in the hands of the clergyman and he was making marginal notes on its leaves when the old servant brought him the volume he had asked for. An easel on one side of the room holds an old oil painting, partly draped on account of a half-nude female figure, the drapery being a compromise between artistic and rural ideas of ecclesiastical propriety.

The silence is broken gently by the chimes of the old church, followed by strokes of the hour on a single bell.

“Eleven o’clock.”

The venerable servant now continues in the line of his previous remarks and in apologetic respect tempered by a sense of duty.

“Yes, Mr. Lyell, I grieve to call your attention to the matter, but at last Wednesday’s service there was a dog-fight near the pond, and by the time Lord John had rubbed both dogs with liniment and set a broken leg for one of them the congregation had to

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

walk out of the church without any service at all, sir. Of course the organist was there and he did all he could to fill the time. He even ventured to have the choir boys sing some of the anthems, but there was no one in the chancel. I—I afterwards took the liberty of —of calling Lord John's attention to the oversight.”

“And what did he say to you, Wattman?”

“He seemed to be thinking of something else, sir; and after a moment he merely remarked that he'd bet three guineas to one on that bull-terrier against any other dog in the village. It's a great relief to me to have you here again, sir. Of course we all love Lord Jack”—

The sedate young clergyman looks up sharply but not unkindly, almost with a smile indeed, at the old servant; and Wattman checks himself with a look of alarmed horror at his own indiscretion.

“I mean—Lord John; we—we always called him Lord Jack in the old days, sir.”

“Yes, I remember.”

“When he was a wild young scape-grace, visiting the Duke at Thrummock Hall; we

KATE : A COMEDY

all loved Lord John then; and we do now, sir; but things are very different in the parish from when old Dr. Willoughby was our rector."

"Very different, Wattman; very!"

Mr. Lyell rises and crosses the room to a small door on the opposite side.

"You may say to Lord Jack, the moment he returns"—

The old servant now glances quickly at the clergyman.

"Say to Lord John—that I have arrived. And Wattman! I came from the Mission Chapel by way of Chesham, this morning. In driving over here from that station I heard the chimes of our church in the distance, for a festival; they were still ringing when I reached the village."

"The arrival of Earl Catherst and his intended bride, sir. The party reached Thrummock Hall at ten o'clock."

"The young American girl, Miss Hardenbeck."

"With her father and mother, sir; and Captain Lord Ffolliet also came down from London with the party. The young

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

lady is to be our future Duchess, you know, if she and Earl Catherst both live to inherit the title; which God grant! They say she is a lovely girl; and her father is immensely rich, like all Americans: we rang the bells to welcome her."

"When did you last see Miss Bianca Dunn, Wattman?"

"Yesterday evening; I intended to speak to you about her, sir. She looked almost ill and she seemed extremely nervous."

"M—m."

Mr. Lyell remains silent a moment, looking down, then walks out through the small door in deep thought. Wattman looks after him, shaking his head slowly, with a long breath; almost a sigh, but not quite. A slight, neatly dressed man opens the door leading from the upper room to the obtrusive landing and balustrade. He has the watchful and keen eye of a conscientious and authorative valet; a smooth face; lips well chiselled, and well trained, also, not to express his thoughts except when he feels it is quite proper for him to do so. He holds two clerical collars in his hands.

KATE : A COMEDY

"Mr. Wattman! I begin to feel very anxious again about Lord John; the St. Lambert's Day services at a quarter before twelve."

He looks around the room carefully as if to be sure that their absolute privacy justifies the next remark.

"If a pretty woman is going around the links with Lord John, Saint Lambert will lose his day."

"Our curate, Mr. Lyell, has returned."

"That relieves my mind."

Mr Nesbitt walks down the steps very deliberately and continues.

"My new responsibilities are making me quite nervous. I was valet of the wildest young nobleman in London, and now he is Rector of a venerable rural parish. You can help me with your advice, Mr. Wattman. This morning one of the Duchess of Manton's maids winked at me as she was passing in the family coach. I knew exactly what to do under such circumstances when my master and I were members of society in London; but what would be good form on my part now, as the valet of a clergyman?"

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

"Some of us must keep up the dignity of the parish, Mr. Nesbitt."

"I took that view of my present position, and I looked severely at the young woman."

The Rev. Lord John Vernor walks in from the churchyard garden; in golfing costume, carrying a bag of clubs; a single glass in his eye; a briarwood pipe. He tosses the clubs to Nesbitt and turns to Wattman.

"Has Mr. Lyell arrived yet?"

"Yes, Lord John; he wished me to tell you."

"I'll see him at once."

Then, after Wattman has disappeared:—

"Lay out my riding togs, Nesbitt; I'll have a run on the mare after luncheon."

"But service, Lord John, at"—

"Service?"

"St. Lambert's"—

"Oh!—of course. My clerical togs. Has my new suit of ecclesiastical armor arrived from London, yet?"

"Yes, my Lord."

"I'll crawl into that. Ah! Lyell, old man!"

"Lord John!"

Mr. Lyell has reappeared from the next room and the two men meet as old friends, shaking hands cordially.

KATE : A COMEDY

“ I was looking for you all last week, Ned.”

“ I was detained at the mission longer than was expected.”

“ I am sorry, my lord, to interrupt you and Mr. Lyell; but”—

“ What is it, Nesbitt?”

“ If Mr. Lyell will pardon me—our time before the service is so short—and I shouldn’t like to put on the new suit without knowing —may I ask your opinion, sir, as to these two collars? One of them is much higher than”—

“ Oh!—get up stairs, Nesbitt;—whichever you put on me— it will choke the life out of me.”

Nesbitt turns reluctantly and re-ascends the steps into the apartment; still looking with dubious professional anxiety at the two collars in his hands as he disappears. Mr. Lyell has moved across to the desk, where he now sits; and Lord John drops into a comfortable old armchair in the middle of the room.

“ We haven’t met for a dozen years, Ned.”

“ Not since we were studying Divinity together, at Oxford.”

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

“You know why *I* was studying Divinity, old man; simply because I was the third son of a British nobleman, with a rich living in the church at his disposal—three thousand pounds a year. My revered grandfather, the sixth Marquis of Garth, almost dissipated the ancestral estates; and my august father, the seventh Marquis, was losing twenty thousand guineas a year on the turf. The eighth Marquis of Garth, that is to be, my eldest brother, was going the pace and needed all the spare cash in the family, except what my second brother, in the Horse Guards, was spending on his military duty and ballet-girls. Where did *I* come in? My only choice, as third son, was between rigid economy and Divinity. I had no taste for either of them. But I couldn’t endure economy: so the Church has to endure me.”

“When we parted from each other at Oxford”—

“I was coming to that. I elected not to take holy orders after receiving my degree, and I told you I was going into the army. My dear old Aunt Elizabeth had left her for-

KATE : A COMEDY

tune to me and I was free. But—Ah!—Ned!"

He holds up his monocle.

"That little piece of glass is all there is left of my military ambition; and Nesbitt won't let me use that in the pulpit. Even my moustache is gone. I'd much prefer to order the congregation to counter-march down the centre aisle, but I am obliged to dismiss it with my blessing. The Church of England was deprived of my services for exactly the time it took me to spend my aunt's fortune."

"I heard, of course, that you had lost it."

"I didn't lose a penny of it; it might have been better if I had; I enjoyed every guinea. But it's gone. When old Dr. Wiloughby died my august father commanded me, and my dear mother implored me, to keep this parish in the family, with its three thousand pounds a year. So I coached up on my Divinity studies again, and here I am. By right of long and faithful service, Ned, you ought to be in my place as rector instead of continuing here as my curate."

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

"It has pleased Divine Providence"—

"And the Marquis of Garth—to order otherwise. I only hope you will remain with me awhile, and not look after your own professional interests elsewhere. I know, of course, that higher honors await you when you seek them."

"It seems to be my duty to remain here at present."

"I'm glad you take that view of it, for I need you, Ned. It's rather odd in its way, but at the end of twelve years in the very vortex of fast life in London I came out with a conscience, old man. It's a broken and battered old conscience, but I am patching it up. I have taken this holy office for a mean, contemptible motive, and I cannot retain enough self-respect to be comfortable without fulfilling the more serious duties of my position as well as I possibly can, for the good of the parish. A thousand human souls, more or less, are in my spiritual charge and I'm the worst heathen of the lot. I don't worry myself much about the regular services; that's mere routine, and I can drop into the habit as well as anybody else after

KATE : A COMEDY

a little. But as the pastor of a flock—that troubles me—I'm not in it.”

Wattman announces a caller; Lady St. John-Glyn. The Rev. Lord John Verner speaks quickly and with marked emphasis.

“Show Lady Sinjon-Glyn to Mr. Lyell's study, Wattman.”

The old servant retires; and the curate looks at his rector inquiringly.

“You and I will divide the work of the parish between us, Lyell. Whenever ladies call to consult with their shepherd—the younger ones, I mean—you will see them.”

Mr. Lyell starts to his feet.

“Sit down, Ned! It is for the good of the parish. A woman of thirty and a woman of sixty are all the same to you, but I can still detect a difference. Sit down!”

Mr Lyell sinks reluctantly towards his seat, but the unexpected division of clerical duties seems to strike his mind with renewed force. Lord John motions him to his chair with half-appealing, half-authoritative gestures.

“For the good of the parish, Ned.”

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

Mr. Lyell finally resumes his seat and Lord John proceeds.

"Now I have something particularly serious to say to you. As I have already told you, I have the battered remnants of a conscience, but even with your help as my curate—we are both bachelors—I could not possibly meet my overwhelming obligations to the people of this parish without a wife at my side interested with me in the work. I am speaking in strict professional confidence, for our marriage is not yet announced. But the woman I need has come to me, as an angel might appear to a man at the dead of night when the darkness is deepest. You know her well; Miss Dorothea Catherst."

"Niece of the Duchess?—the Earl's cousin—I congratulate you; no one in the parish, while Dr. Willoughby was living, assisted us so continually and so efficiently as Miss Catherst."

"Her purity of character and her innocence of the world fascinate me. It will be the usual unfair exchange between man and woman. My 'love', as I may call it perhaps, seems rank and stale in her pres-

KATE : A COMEDY

ence, and I hardly dared to use the word when I proposed marriage to her. But even a man like me may offer the tribute of reverence to a good woman."

"Miss Catherst's strong sense of duty"—

"That's what I seem to see in Dorothea's eyes when she looks into mine; a sense of duty."

"I am very glad you have arranged the marriage. And now, Lord John, we'll exchange a few words if you like about those sermons."

"Oh!—the ones I sent to you last week; have you looked them over?"

"Yes; they are here on the desk."

"Is the theology all right for this parish? About the same as Dr. Willoughby's? I'd like to have my theology match on to his, you know; it'll save explanations."

"All the doctrinal sermons are sound apparently for the Church of England, and they quite agree with Dr. Willoughby's opinions—except one; that is Scotch Presbyterian."

"Bob Nicholson got 'em mixed; he wrote the lot for me—fifty pounds. Bob's down

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

on his luck just now, you know. We must change that one. My Church of England sermon has gone to some Scotchman; I hope he hasn't preached it."

"Here is one sermon which is not doctrinal, and it seems to be in your own handwriting; the rest are typewritten. You have given this one a title as well as a text; —*Marriage and the Marriage Ceremony.*"

"I didn't intend to send you that; wrote it myself. I don't need to consult you or anybody else, Ned, on moral and social subjects. There isn't another clergyman in England that knows more about social morality than I do. The rest of them take a bird's-eye view of it and twitter; I have had a closer view and I can screech."

"You must allow me to make a suggestion concerning this sermon on the score of prudence; this passage, for instance."

Mr. Lyell reads from the sermon in his hand.

The Holy Church has no authority to sanctify a marriage based on mere worldly interest or social ambition. In such a case even the church service cannot make a man

KATE : A COMEDY

and woman husband and wife in the eyes of God. Their cohabitation is sin!—and the blessing of the clergyman does not change the fact.

“Well?”

Mr. Lyell still reads.

Such a union, being a strictly business transaction, makes the Holy Order of Matrimony in our Book of Common Prayer a mere theatrical farce, performed in the very chancel of the sacred edifice. The performance of such a farce by any clergyman, knowingly, is a sacrilegious act.

“How, may I ask, Lord John, can the clergyman interfere?”

“He can’t, perhaps. But he can at least show some interest in the subject; he need not ignore it and he need not lend his church without question to display weddings when the parties are notoriously married for money or for title.”

“You continue:”—

In Baptism a clergyman asks, at least, if this child has been baptized before, and in Confirmation he examines each applicant rigidly and personally, not content with read-

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

ing a few passages to him from a printed book. Even the dead are refused Christian burial. But in Marriage which we call holy—and it is quite as holy as dying—too many of our clergymen care nothing for the fact that the motive may be a low personal interest, and they seldom even preach sermons on the subject. The words of the service are sometimes mere blasphemy as they drop from a pastor's lips, and all that hear them know it.

Wattman announces another caller.

“Policeman Dimples, Lord John.”

“Show him in. I will see the *men*, Lyell. What’s the trouble with that sermon? You spoke of prudence; isn’t what I say true?”

“You will probably hear from the Bishop if you read it in the pulpit.”

“I am more familiar with the practical results of such marriages than any bishop in England. My own character, to say nothing of my fortune, was wrecked with the ready assistance of women who had married for money or for social position. Do I want more evidence? I can get it from a hundred other young fools such as I was. Who are the women that break other

KATE : A COMEDY

women's hearts? They are the social wrecks of marriage for ambition and wealth; floating derelicts that make our domestic life a peril. Let us fight against divorce at the altar of the Church; in the Law Courts or the Legislature it is too late. Whatever else I may be, Lyell, in my sacred office—a mere hired Christian and a hypocrite—I am an honest missionary in that field."

The cheery cynicism, calm, almost indifferent and covering a smile though not a sneer, which the new "Rector" had shown in most of the above conversation—except when he spoke in a reverential tone of the Honorable Miss Dorothea Catherst—disappeared entirely when the subject of marriage came up as discussed in his own sermon. Earnest conviction has now taken the place of cynicism and Lord John shows the curiously impressive seriousness of a man of the world when aroused, only for a moment perhaps, to more vital thoughts of life than he is accustomed to consider. There is a slight flush on his face as he rises with the last words, turns toward the open door and looks off into the little church-

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

yard. The chimes in the old tower are heard again, giving the few musical notes of the first quarter.

A rural policeman, solid of frame and round of face—a face glowing with the bright tint of health, which overlies a more deeply ruddy color due to frequent mugs of ale—is shown in with quiet solemnity by the old servant, who disappears in silence. The new-comer stands respectfully until addressed, after acknowledging a slight inclination of the head from Mr. Lyell with the half-military, half-menial salute peculiar to an English policeman. Lord John turns back again.

“Dimps!”

“Lord Jack!—I mean, Lord John. I ask your pardon, my lord; but everybody in Pengrue-Catherst”—

“It’ll take time, Dimps, and there’s only a slight change after all since I used to visit here. I broke the laws then and I enforce them now. You were obliged to haul me up to the Magistrate occasionally; to-day, I am a magistrate, myself. What can I do for you?”

KATE : A COMEDY

“Tow Path Bill, your lordship”—

“Bill Grouter, the millhand? He is keeping the promise of his youth, I suppose. Do you still have trouble with him?”

“Offen, my lord.”

“By the bye, Lyell; we forgot. Lady Sinjon-Glyn is waiting for you.”

Mr. Lyell starts to his feet and moves across the room.

“Remember, Ned, all the young ones are in your department—Heaven save the parish—and me!—if they weren’t!”

The Reverend Mr. Lyell walks out gravely into his study.

“Well, Dimples—what about Tow Path Bill?”

“ ‘E’s the most violent and dangerous man in the county now, my lord!”

“I dare say.”

“And ‘e’s comin’ ‘ome from prison on the one-fifteen train this afternoon. Every time Tow Path Bill comes ‘ome from prison ‘e gets drunk and wallups the poor wife and we all feels for ‘er, my lord; with a black eye for two weeks afterwards. Dr. Willoughby used to meet ‘im at the railway

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

station when 'e come 'ome from prison and he prayed with him."

"Dr. Willoughby's treatment was not successful apparently!"

"No, my lord; and it does seem a great pity too, Lord John. You know the swift part of the river runnin' by the mills under Thrummock 'all 'ill. Tow Path Bill 'as pulled more women and children and drunken men out 'o that reach than 'e could count on 'is fingers and 'is two thumbs; but 'e can't count more'n five and no one knows 'ow many 'e 'as saved; and sometimes it's a near squeak for 'is h'own life. 'E's a valuable citizen, Tow Path Bill is, when 'e isn't drunk and 'ittin' some'un; and 'e doesn't stop when 'e's been 'ittin' 'is wife, h'either. 'E 'its the rest of us. When I sees 'im drunk I allus waits till he gets more drunk and then I drags 'im in. Will you be at the station, Lord John? It might 'elp some; perhaps 'e'll be summat in liquor when 'e h'arrives and 'e may be h'open to religious h'influences."

"You may give a message to Tow Path Bill for me when he gets off the train. Tell

KATE : A COMEDY

him I will send him a ten pound note every time he rescues a human being from the river."

"E deserves it, Lord John."

"And more than that amount if it's a dangerous case and he puts his own life in serious peril. You may also say to him for me that every time he gives his wife a black eye the new rector will give *him* a black eye."

"My lord!"

"We will pray together afterwards; I am merely modifying Dr. Willoughby's treatment. And you may assure Tow Path Bill that it is my intention to make him the best Christian in my parish if I have to break every bone in his body to save his soul."

A pretty young woman, daintily dressed, steps into the room at the door leading from Mr. Lyell's study and stops abruptly.

"Lady Sinjon-Glyn!"

"Lord John!"

They bow with all the formality due to the presence of a third person, especially one of an humbler class; to whom Lord John again turns.

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

"Give Tow Path Bill a pastor's blessing,
Dimps."

"Yes, Lord Jack—I mean—good-day,
Lord John."

Peeler Dimps—every English "Bobby" is known also as a "Peeler"—is evidently embarrassed by the rich confusion of ideas in his head and half backs out of the door behind him, turning nervously to recover his official dignity, but finally disappearing without any very definite impression apparently of how he gets out of the room.

The pretty stranger now looks at the Rector with a twist of the head on the neck common to canaries and young women fully conscious of their own charms. An impatient smile, suppressed just long enough for the policeman to disappear, rises to her lips and dimples her face. Her eyes twinkle mischievously.

"Jack, old boy!"

"Fannie!"

"You tried to put me off on your curate!"

"He let you escape."

A burst of laughter.

"Lady Betty Arden and Mallory Marshbanks and the Countess"—

KATE : A COMEDY

"Little Hawksbury? Is she back from India?"

"M—m. They're all down from London to visit me for a month, and we four women have put our heads together. We've formed a syndicate, to help you in your parish work."

"The Reverend Mr. Lyell will"—

"Oh—no! I don't wonder you want to put the young women off on him, but not the Syndicate!"

Again the canary-bird twist of her neck, the sparkle in the eye and the smile; becoming deadly. She moves to his side and places her right hand in his arm, rests her left hand over it and lays her cheek on his shoulder, looking up at him.

"It's hard, Jack, isn't it? We all pity you—struggling to be good!—and we're all here to help you."

Then another merry peal of laughter as she swings away from him. She stops suddenly before the picture and raises the folds that half cover it.

"The Temptation of St. Anthony!"

Still holding up the drapery of the easel, she looks over her shoulder.

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

"I daresay *you* can resist a pretty woman, Jack, when you're as old as he was. But I'd rather trust the young woman than the old saint. Depend upon it she saved St. Anthony; that was the miracle. We women save you men from yourselves. I wonder how often I've saved you from yourself, Jack."

"It's a way you women in our set have; put a man where he needs saving and then save him. Ah, well!—it's no use for me to talk seriously to you, Fannie; you four women know all about my past life."

"No, we don't. We're not so big a syndicate as that. There was Paris as well as London, and Monte Carlo and Nice. Oh!—that's what I came in to see you about to-day; Nice. You remember when you returned from Nice last February, just after the Mardi Gras ball."

She holds up a very delicate lace handkerchief of rich pattern.

"Lady Betty Arden stole this from your chambers in the Albany."

"Oh!—it was Betty, was it?"

"Of course I couldn't give it to Mr.

KATE : A COMEDY

Lyell. Your curate can't take your place with us young women in everything. Lady Betty asked me to return the precious souvenir to you."

She gives him the handkerchief; he receives it quietly and with little apparent interest.

"Thank you."

"It is our first effort to assist you in your parochial duties. You once raved over that little piece of lace as if it were as large as a table-cloth."

"It is only a reminder now of a life that I regret. I shall destroy it."

"Such a confection as that! I will report the sacrifice to the ladies of the Syndicate. It will encourage us greatly in our good work."

Folding her hands, with falling eyelids.

"How is your venerable husband, Sir William?"

"Very ill indeed; and more and more like an angel as he loses strength. The darling old man! He grows better and weaker every day; I can't keep him out of Heaven much longer. Good-bye!"

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

They bow almost solemnly and she turns away demurely through the door to the further apartment; looks back; tosses him a kiss; disappears. Lord John is thoughtful a moment though smiling as he looks after her; then turns away and suddenly glances down at the handkerchief in his hand. He is still regarding it steadily as Wattman announces Mrs. Jane Dunn.

“Show her to Mr. Lyell. How old is she?”

“About sixty”—

“I’ll see her.”

Wattman goes out; and Lord John, returning to the handkerchief, slowly spreads it over his hand. He seems to recall a memory and raises the bit of lace unconsciously towards his face; stops a moment with his eyes fixed upon it; then presses it against his lips.

A plain old lady, in simple dress, is shown in by the servant, who disappears, leaving her to await Lord John’s attention. The latter finally turns to the visitor and places the handkerchief in his breast pocket quickly.

“Mrs. Dunn!”

“Our—our pastor! You don’t remem-

KATE : A COMEDY

ber me, Lord Jack—pardon me, my lord—Lord John.”

“Your face comes back to me; the good lady under the hill below Thrummock Hall that used to give Archibald and me elderberry wine and seed cakes.”

“Yes, my lord.”

With a beaming smile, gratified by his recognition.

“And wasn’t there a sharp-eyed little baby-imp that”—

“Yes, Lord John; you always called her a ‘baby-imp.’ I wanted to speak with you to-day about her, my lord; Bianca. She’s eighteen years old now and a lovely girl.”

“Eighteen? Is it possible? Eighteen! My curate, Mr. Lyell, will”—

“Oh, sir! I—I shouldn’t like to speak to him about Bianca. You see, my lord, Mr. Lyell and Bianca”—

“What?”

“They—they were once engaged to be married, my lord.”

“Um—m. What can I do in the matter?”

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

"It isn't about that, my lord. But I've had trouble with the dear girl ever since my brother, Captain Tom"—

"The old sea-captain—is he still living?"

"He died about a year ago."

"Captain Tom brought little Bianca home to you from one of his long voyages."

"He picked her up in the Mediterranean Ocean off the coast of Greece."

"Y-e-s: I remember."

"That's what my brother Tom told all of us, Lord John; and he had the record of her baptism in his own name for want of any other name being pinned on her my lord and ever since he brought that baby home I've been that worried and I tried so hard to give the girl a solid English education."

Then the good, motherly, dear old British housewife, having thus recalled the one long worrying anxiety of her life, rattles on in a way that makes punctuation absolutely impossible in real life or on the printed page.

"But I never got one honest English idea into her head about morals and the multiplication table and religion you know when Captain Tom used to come home from sea

KATE : A COMEDY

he'd only laugh at me and he and little Bianca would go off on long walks together and after that the girl would talk about animals and skies and birds and the new puppies in the Duke's kennels the time I always had in straightening out that girl after Captain Tom would go away again and he spent all his money on music teachers and Frenchmen for Bianca and books and I trying to make the girl learn the Catechism and the Apostle's Creed and the Ten Commandments by heart what could I do?"

The inexperienced Rector has been listening intently and conscientiously to the sweet old lady, but with a puzzled expression as if trying to solve a new problem in his profession.

"The proper education of little Bianca as an English girl has embarrassed you."

"Yes my lord and brother Tom being a sea-captain he swore horribly of course and Bianca loved him so I never could persuade the girl swearing wasn't correct language Lord John—Mr. Lyell!"

"Mrs. Dunn!"

The curate has returned from his study.

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

At the same moment Nesbitt reappears on the opposite side of the room from the upper apartment; a pair of neatly pressed black trousers lying over his arm.

"Really, Lord John—there isn't a moment more to spare. I ought to have your proper suit on in five minutes, and I hardly dare try the new one as it is."

"Your valet is quite right, my lord; I will speak with our parishioner."

"Thank you. Good day, Mrs. Dunn. Coming, Nesbitt."

"Good day, my lord."

Lord John hurries up the steps and the valet follows him out of the room. The troubled old lady is evidently somewhat nervous as she looks at Mr. Lyell, left alone with him; but he himself has the calm, dignified, unruffled demeanor that never deserts him.

"What is it, Mrs. Dunn? Bianca?"

"Yes, sir."

"You may be as frank with me as you would have been with the Rector himself. The Earl Catherst returned to Thrummock Hall this morning with the young American

KATE : A COMEDY

woman who is to be his future wife—and what about Bianca? Is she well to-day?"

Again the rapid tongue of Mrs. Dunn defies the art of punctuation.

"The poor girl came down from Thrum-mock Hall only a few moments after they arrived sir she dropped upon the sofa in my cottage and she seemed that miserable poor dear she didn't say anything only pale and nervous and silent and the chimes in the church pealing so merrily all the time it almost broke my heart sir what troubles me most just after his lordship the Earl went away from here last time to Paris Tow Path Bill came to me and said he'd been watching my girl and I'd better keep her at home with me at night tied to a doorknob those were his very words and only last night I found Bianca down by the river."

"The river!"

The grave curate turns away from her, walking to the door; he looks out silently a moment at the broken tombstones and the ivy-clad church; then returns.

"We can hear a low, faint, distant sound of the current from our door. Well?"

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

"That swift and dangerous part of the river just above the mills at the foot of Thrummock Hall Park the rocks are wet there sir and the least step you know and Bianca so nervous now!"

"Tow Path Bill was watching the girl after the Earl Catherst left for Paris; you say he warned you?"

A young man in the early thirties, neatly groomed, graceful in carriage and cheery in manner, appears at the doorway from the garden as if the usual formalities of a visitor's announcement were unnecessary in his case. He looks about the room as he comes in and sees Mr. Lyell.

"Ned, old boy!"

"My lord!"

"I'm back again."

He stops suddenly as he comes forward, recognizing another visitor.

"And I'm glad to see *you*, Mrs. Dunn."

"You're very kind my lord thank you my lord I am sure we're all very much delighted to have you return to Thrummock Hall my lord thank you my lord good-bye my lord."

The simple old lady has punctuated this

KATE : A COMEDY

last speech, not by checking her tongue but by a series of motions, each bringing her nearer to the door by which she had come in, and her final disappearance serves as a full-stop to the composite sentence. The Earl Catherst looks after her with an amused smile, then turns to Mr. Lyell.

"I fear I've interrupted some parochial solemnity. You look serious, Ned. Where is Jack Vernor? He's a parson like you now; you've got him in harness at last."

"He has assumed his new duties as Rector, your lordship."

"My 'lordship!' What are you giving me, Ned? When did I become 'your lordship,' to you—in private?"

"Mrs. Dunn has been speaking to me of her niece, Bianca."

"Oh!—and of me, incidentally; I see. You feel a bit hard towards me, Ned; and you have a perfect right to feel so. I did you a bad turn; but not intentionally, old boy, and it'll come out all right. When Bianca Dunn came to live at Thrummock Hall as my mother's companion we—she and I—drifted together, you know. *I* saw

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

her every day, and *you* didn't. That's all there was of it. We wandered in the park together; her pretty head full of wild thoughts, every animal her personal friend and the birds chatting with her; at least they seemed to. I—I did give her a volume of Mrs. Browning's love poems, and we read them side by side under an old oak by the river. I ought not to have done it, but it's all past now. She's a good girl, Ned, and I—I still hope—honestly, I do"—

"That Bianca and I shall yet be married."

Dropping into the chair at the desk; Edward Lyell looks down wearily rather than in sorrow, as a man who has no intention, now, of repeating his past struggles.

"You take things too seriously, my old friend; and we mustn't leave off this way, Ned. Did you ever read a book—an American book—by a young Californian—Jack London, I think his name is—entitled *The Call of the Wild?*"

"I have heard of it."

"The hero is a dog; a highly civilized dog; but like all the rest of us the descendant of savages. They took him to the boundless

KATE: A COMEDY

forests of Canada and he heard the primeval howl of the wolf. It was the voice of his own savage ancestors inviting him back to the wilderness. He answered the call of the Wild and disappeared forever. I was like that dog. Bianca Dunn's voice is soft and sweet, but it is the Call of the Wild."

"I understand you."

"Yes: you, too, have heard it. She is a remnant of savage life; of brigandage and revolution in the mountains of Thessaly; and *we* are both tired of our own civilization. We rebel against our collars and our annual bench-show, the London season. The outer world is full of our kind of Englishman—Arizona and Australia—they are the most disreputable of the desperadoes and the wilder sort of cowboys. One of my own ancestors was tired of being a decent man two hundred years ago. He brought home a wife from among those same brigands of Thessaly. You've seen the picture of that Duchess in the family portrait gallery at Thrummock Hall; with her deep eyes and a smile so weird that she seems to be laugh-

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

ing at her own descendants. Whenever I look at that portrait I envy the old brute that made her his wife. I have his blood and hers in my veins. Bianca Dunn has her face!"

"The picture might be Bianca's own portrait."

"Well, Ned, old boy—I tore myself away at last and escaped—to Paris. The Call of the Wild became fainter and fainter and finally it died away. Bianca met me this morning only as a sweet and pleasant friend. To be perfectly frank, it wasn't quite agreeable to my vanity, but the incident is closed. She is as pure a girl as ever lived, Ned: and I hope she'll be your wife."

"I trust the incident *is* closed, for both of you."

The chimes of the church strike the second quarter. Edward Lyell rises and walks slowly to the open door where he turns and looks back at his friend.

"Listen to me, Archibald!"

The two men look squarely at each other, face to face.

"I am going now to kneel at the altar

KATE : A COMEDY

of our church. You will hear the Call of the Wild again. I shall pray to God that you may not answer it."

He walks slowly across the garden towards the church and Archibald stands motionless, watching him until he disappears with bowed head among the trees. The young patrician looks down in deep thought.

"The Call of the Wild!"

The Rev. Lord John Verner reappears from his own apartments and stops suddenly on the landing behind the balustrade, staring across the room. He is now in clerical attire, with gold spectacles.

"Archibald!"

"Jack!"

There is a moment's pause, the two regarding each other.

"I know it's a shock to you."

"Take off those spectacles, Jack, or I'll explode."

Lord John removes his spectacles gravely and walks down the steps. He inserts his fingers between his collar and his neck. Archibald bursts into laughter.

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

“Collar a trifle tight?”

“No; but it chokes me all the same.”

“A parson at last!—instead of a guardsman!”

“Don’t laugh at me, old man!”

“All right, Jack; I’ll keep my face straight; there’s my hand.”

The two friends grasp each other’s hand heartily.

“But hang me if I shall be able to do it when I see you in the pulpit. You and I haven’t met for nearly a year. We missed each other on the Continent last winter. Tom Lyttleton told me he met you at the masquerade ball at Nice, in February.”

“Cut that!”

“Curious, too, wasn’t it?—for I was at that very ball, in a box, with Mr. and Mrs. Hardenbeck—and Kate.”

“Your American fiancée.”

“Yes; you shall meet her to-day, in a few moments I dare say. Dorothea brought us down to attend your service this morning. Dorry says you are very impressive.”

“Please don’t laugh, old fellow.”

“Certainly not, Jack. You were in dom-

KATE : A COMEDY

ino and mask at the ball, of course; so was I; natural enough we shouldn't meet."

"Never mind the masquerade! So another heir of an old English dukedom has taken a republican maiden to his heart."

"Republican? That's the only point on which Kate and I are not quite congenial. *I'm* a bit democratic, you know. Kate is the very latest thought of civilization in New York, and highly aristocratic. She is the final result up-to-date of society woman-culture. I left her in the churchyard with Dorothea looking up the tombstones in her Baedeker. That, by the way, is the form an American girl's religion seems to take; it's a cross between worshipping dead men in a graveyard and in a picture gallery. I've been on a tour with Kate and her parents. Wherever we go she is a devotee of the highest artistic taste—to say nothing of Parisian costumes—and of one sacred volume, Baedeker; her Bible, her Prayer Book and her Hymnal! But a New York girl has one great virtue as a wife, Jack; there's nothing about her to suggest repentance to a man."

"That will be a great comfort."

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

"Won't it? But if I should confess my past sins to her"—

"Don't!"

"I sha'n't. She'd look up the letter "H" in Baedeker and arrange a nice little trip below for us. That's in your line now, by the bye; and speaking of repentance, I just met Lady Sin and Betty Arden. They were both talking to me at once and they tumbled over each other trying to tell me about you and a lace handkerchief and a girl at that *bal masqué* in Nice."

"Dear creatures! Fannie just left me."

"I told you Kate and I were there, with her parents, in a box."

"As I requested you before, please cut that *bal masqué*."

"I see it annoys you; and I sha'n't refer to it again—only—oh!—I *must* tell you this."

Here Archibald indulges in a long low laugh, recalling a memory.

"It was the usual thing, you know; same with all those French masquerades; but you remember—at a signal from the band at midnight decorum vanished and whatever was left of eminent respectability disappeared

KATE : A COMEDY

from the Opera House. The floor suddenly became a pandemonium. A dozen coteries sprang into life by magic; skirts flew into the air and every silk hat within reach of a French dancing girl's toe started for the ceiling."

"Need we continue this subject?"

"By no means, old boy: I was merely going to tell you a little incident; nothing in it. But Miss Hardenbeck was on the floor when the uproar began."

"On the floor?"

"With her father."

"Oh!"

"I had told them half an hour before that it was time for our party to leave the Opera House; but they didn't dream of what was really coming, and while I was away from the box for a moment Kate disappeared with the old gentleman. They were in the middle of the crush when the whirlwind broke loose. Kate reappeared, flushed, indignant and crumpled; and she dragged us all out of the building."

"You spent some time among the Italian lakes, I believe; calm, serene and beautiful, aren't they?"

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

“Tell me about the girl at the masquerade; the one Lady Sin and Betty Arden—the lace handkerchief—what were they trying to”—

“Once for all, old man!—and then we’ll drop the subject—I did make a fool of myself that night.”

“So Betty seemed to think.”

“And for a long time afterwards.”

“Fannie said so.”

“Quite right, both of them; and there is the bit of fluff nonsense they told you about.”

Taking the lace handkerchief from his pocket; he holds it up with careless indifference.

“I’m going to burn it.”

The handkerchief attracts Archibald’s attention and he approaches nearer, looking at it with a fixed gaze.

“Lady Betty Arden stole it from my rooms at the Albany and Lady Sin returned it to me to-day. I have already acknowledged myself a fool, and that is the last frail relic of an unworthy life.”

Archibald quietly takes the handkerchief into his own hands and he is looking at it with interest as Lord John continues:—

KATE : A COMEDY

“It shall go up in smoke.”

“A monogram in the corner.”

“I could never make that out; can you?”

“It isn’t very clear.”

“It was a silly infatuation on my part, old man. I merely looked into a woman’s eyes—and she into mine. Her mask had dropped from her face and my own was in my hand. We—we looked into each other’s eyes.”

He throws unconscious sentiment into the tones of his voice as he slowly utters the last words above, and he looks down in deep thought. Archibald’s eyes are now watching him steadily; there is a long pause.

“Go on!”

Lord John stands motionless and silent: still looking down.

“Jack!”

He does not hear; the silence continues.

“You’ve quite forgotten the incident, I see.”

“Eh?”

Lord John looks up as if from a dream.

“You and the girl looked into each other’s eyes.”

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

"Oh!—drop it all!—this nonsense is over."

He moves to the old desk and proceeds to light a wax candle, in an ornamental candle-stick on a tray.

"I'm going to burn the thing, I tell you."

"She gave you this?"

"It merely fell to the floor in the confusion, and the crush separated us. You may burn it yourself, and then you can swear to it when you defend my reputation in this parish. Those chattering magpies may make the most of it. When I blow out this poor, weak flame"—

He holds up the lighted candle.

"All the frivolous memories of my past life shall go with it."

Turns to Archibald; but he stops suddenly as he sees a beautiful woman enter the room from the lawn.

"Dorothea!"

"John!"

She is in simple but rich attire with hair brushed smoothly over her temples. Lord John stands looking at her, the lighted candle in his hand. His friend, with the graceful alertness of a man of the world,

KATE : A COMEDY

accustomed to social emergencies and to explaining the unexplainable, takes a cigarette from a case and lights it at the candle.

"Thank you, Jack."

He then turns toward the beautiful newcomer.

"Where did you leave Kate, Dorry?"

"She disappeared among the trees and old tombstones between the church and the river."

"Heaven knows where she and Saint Baedeker are by this time; I'll look for them. Kate and I will join you in the family pew if I can find her."

He goes out quickly, the lace handkerchief still in his hand. Lord John, having hurriedly replaced the lighted candle on the old desk, turns to Dorothea, now standing at the back of the armchair in the centre of the room.

"We have come down to attend the service, John. My aunt and Mrs. Hardenbeck are also with us."

"You are always present at divine service, Dorothea."

"It is my duty."

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

"Ah, yes—I know; you never neglect your duty."

"I trust not, John; and this morning above all others I wish to unite with you in worship. This afternoon, you know"—

"This afternoon?"

"Surely"—

"Of course: at three-thirty."

"Yes; at half-past three. We are to announce to my aunt and to my uncle our wish to be united in the holy bonds of wedlock. It is well for us to pray together to-day; to pray that we may meet our future duties in this parish in a manner befitting the deep responsibilities that will rest upon us. I was trying to recall as we were coming here that beautiful passage you referred to when you were at Thrummock Hall on Thursday evening."

"The war-horse smelleth the battle afar off; the"—

"Not that passage; it was the one about eternal peace. Ah, John! It is always a delight to me to listen to you; to converse with a man who has high aspirations and such a noble character. You have lived in

KATE : A COMEDY

the great world, yet pure and unsullied among men."

Lord John looks troubled, and one hand moves upward with that peculiar tendency which science has never explained, a tendency apparently universal among men to scratch some part of the head when their consciences become uncomfortable.

"I—y-e-s—m-m."

He crosses the room in deep thought, the eyes of Miss Catherst following him.

"I'm afraid we don't quite understand each other, Dorothea."

"I try to appreciate you."

"M-m."

"And I have always looked up to you as to a"—

"Exactly; I'm not in that direction."

"What, dear?"

"My intentions are all right—now."

"Of course. You are a clergyman of the Church."

"I am trying to be a Christian, also."

"John!"

The chimes strike the third quarter, the Rector standing with bowed head and the

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

sweet young woman listening reverentially.

“It is the hour of service, John.”

“Mr. Lyell shall conduct it to-day. I am not fit to do so.”

“I see how it is. The best of us have moments of spiritual depression like this. Mr. Lyell is already at the altar; I saw him kneeling there and a ray of light was falling through the window on his head. I paused to look at him; it seemed as if a strong angel of the Lord were kneeling in the sanctuary. The light will shine again for you also, dear. You will be at Thrummock Hall this afternoon?—at my side, to announce our wishes to the Duchess and the Duke.”

“At three-thirty.”

“I will pray for us both to-day, John.”

She turns with calm, benign dignity and walks to the door, out upon the lawn and away among the trees toward the church. The Reverend Lord John Vernor stands a moment longer in thought, then crosses the room slowly and drops upon the chair before the old desk. The candle is still burning, and his head falls upon his hand as he looks at the flame.

KATE : A COMEDY

The organ of the church is heard—the voluntary before service.

The figure of a young woman, exquisitely costumed and in perfect good taste, the very latest dream of a Parisian modiste, comes from thickly-matted shrubbery on the side of the little churchyard opposite to that from which the other lovely woman has just disappeared. The Parisian Dream floats among the old gravestones like an unusual vision, yet it is a woman of solid flesh withal and brilliant in the colors of health. She pauses before an ancient tomb at the very door of the Rectory trying to decipher the inscription; throws open a volume and reads. The tones of the organ almost die away, as if upward, accompanying the first unspoken prayers of worshippers in the church, and the Rector in the parsonage arouses himself. He extends his hand and raises the lighted candle; looks at it a moment in silence.

“Memories!”

He blows out the flame, and still gazes before him, as if the memories which he hoped to extinguish were yet smoking, like the wick.

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

The Parisian Dream, at the door, is still intent on her book.

Lord John rises and turns to go up the steps to his apartment, but stops abruptly as he sees the unexpected figure of a young girl before the tomb. She looks up frankly and steps forward in the doorway.

"Pardon the intrusion, but this is the Reverend Lord John Verner."

"My curate, Mr. Lyell, will meet you after the service."

"They showed me a picture of you this morning, at Thrummock Hall."

"At Thrummock Hall! Is this Miss Katherine Hardenbeck?"

"Yes."

They bow formally to each other.

"I was just reading what Baedeker says about the beautiful tomb at your door. The inscription is given here in full, though I can hardly decipher it in the stone itself."

Then she reads from the book in her hand; gradually advancing as she does so into the room.

Here lieth the first Rector of Pengrue-Catherst. This noble man was distinguished alike

KATE: A COMEDY

for his piety, the holy aspirations of his spirit and the saint-like purity of his character.

She looks up from the book into his face suddenly. He starts and leans forward. They gaze steadily into each other's eyes, both of them perfectly still.

"You are the successor of that saintly pastor!"

Lord John draws back, turning away from her and tugging at his clerical collar as if it were suddenly oppressing him again. Kate tears a leaf from the volume and punches holes in it with her fingers. Lord John recovers his breath.

"I do not presume to fill that good man's place, but I have been called to the ministry of—"

"Called?"

"By the Marquis of Garth."

The clear bright notes of the young woman's laughter ring through the old rectory and Lord John turns towards her again. She holds up the torn-out page of the book before her face as if it were a mask, staring at him through the holes and moving backward step by step towards the door and through it.

WHEN MARRIAGE IS A FARCE

The Reverend Lord John Verner puts both hands into his collar and breaks it open with a vigorous tug, dropping into the arm-chair; the ends of the collar standing up on both sides at the back of his neck, his legs extended and his hands thrust into his trouser-pockets viciously.

The musical laughter of the girl is still heard from among the trees, mingling with the tones of the organ, which come back to earth and swell in majestic volume, announcing the beginning of divine service.

ACT II
—
LOVE AND
LEGAL DOCUMENTS



ACT SECOND

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

A YOUNG girl in riding habit with crop in hand stands upon a veranda at the opening of a large baywindow in the drawing room of Throckmonck Hall, overlooking the village of Pengrue-Catherst. She looks off dreamily over the lower park, which drops to a swiftly-flowing river almost at her feet, and over softly cultivated valleys beyond the river now lying in the hazy sunlight of a September afternoon. The Chiltern hills, in the distance, fade imperceptibly into the atmosphere with hardly more outline than the air itself. Such scenes are the day dreams of rural England, irresistible in their charm to every American, and it is an American girl that now stands looking at this one in Buckinghamshire. The little village below

KATE : A COMEDY

lies close to the river, its thatches and red tiles visible here and there embowered in trees, and the old Norman tower of the church rises above the foliage yet still beneath the veranda. Huge, almost decrepit, slow-grinding mills also lie near the stream, the waters of which splash angrily as they flow by the Park, but seem to offer their respectful services for the mill-wheels, or silently pass by, now still and deep, to fall over the weir.

Miss Dorothea Catherst is sitting within the drawing room. She appears still more beautiful perhaps when her hat is laid aside showing all of the hair severely smooth over a classical head. Her afternoon costume is even more simple if possible and more rich than her morning toilet; it is that greatest triumph of the dressmaker's art, the adequate expression in silk or satin or velvet of religious simplicity, aristocratic feeling and humility. Dorothea is embroidering an altar cloth. The whole picture—herself, the altar cloth and the tapestry-hung room—is in perfect keeping and in perfect taste. Even the weather-stained statues on the balus-

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

trade of the veranda are a part of the picture as they are seen through the great bay-window and through another large window opening to the floor. The only exotic thing in the whole scene, without or within, is the trim young figure of the New York girl; the expectant future mistress of everything in sight except the distant hills and the sky. Miss Catherst has touched a bell on the table at her side and a dignified, but in no way pompous, family servant has entered to learn her wishes.

"The Reverend Lord John Verner will call this afternoon, Bailey, at half past three. You may tell him he will find me in the library with Lord Ffolliett."

"At half past three; yes, miss."

Bailey retires and Miss Catherst resumes her embroidery. The chimes of the little church, now distant and as soft as the September light, are heard from the village below, noting the passing of time in their own persistent, regular, inevitable way. Kate Hardenbeck looks down at the tower, listening, then turns and comes into the room.

"What a dear old church it is, and a dear

KATE : A COMEDY

old village to match it, down at the foot of the hill!"

Miss Catherst does not raise her eyes from her embroidery as she takes up the theme.

"The chimes seem to repeat to us constantly—'nearer to the next world —only a few minutes—but nearer!' This is the new church."

"The new one!"

"Built by William the Conqueror on the site of the old Saxon edifice."

"Ah!"

Kate's exclamation is the sudden expression of an enthusiasm for what is ancient and historical which neither her companion nor anyone else born in Europe can possibly feel; the enthusiasm lights up her face brilliantly.

"You cannot understand the feelings of an American girl in my position, Miss Catherst. These magnificent lands!—for miles around us—with all the subdued and gentle and slowly fading glory of the past; and I—but never mind me, Miss Catherst; I was sorry not to be with you in the family pew this morning; came straight back to

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

the Hall. The Reverend Lord John Verner did not conduct the services, you said."

"A cloud of self-distrust had settled over our good pastor's spirit."

"M-m."

"Even the saints, I imagine, cannot always escape that."

"Not even such a saint as Lord John Verner. It's lucky for me to-day that *I'm* a saint. Archibald has kept me waiting fifteen minutes for our ride. But I just saw him coming up the path. He'll be here in a moment now. My horse—poor, darling old Dick!—is pawing the ground and neighing the heart out of him at the door of the west tower, impatient for me to be on his back. He's becoming quite indignant about it. Dick has been my traveling companion almost since he was a colt. By the bye, Miss Catherst, while Dick and I are still waiting for Archibald I wish to ask you something. I just caught sight again of that strange young creature, Bianca Dunn. She was standing on another part of the veranda, looking off over the valley with a far-away, dreamy expression, as if only

KATE : A COMEDY

the distant background caught her eye—or something far beyond that. Tell me about her. I am sure there is a tragedy in that girl's life somewhere; or there's one coming—I don't know which. I never saw a sadder pair of eyes, and my own first meeting with her this morning was almost a shock to me. The moment I took the girl's hand in mine I knew that she was a quivering bundle of nerves."

"Many young women have suffered as Bianca Dunn has, but she takes it hardly. It is no secret in Pengrue-Catherst; a broken engagement."

"Is that all?—her first, I suppose."

"Bianca and Mr. Lyell were utterly unsuited to each other."

"Mr. Lyell?"

"Our curate. In my own opinion the interests of the parish would have suffered greatly if their marriage had come about. Mr. Lyell is a man of superbly balanced character and high Christian dignity."

"You admire him."

"Very much; and I respect him greatly. As to Bianca Dunn, that remarkable young

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

girl would hardly do for any "clergyman's wife. Have you heard her use profane language yet?"

"Swear?"

"Oh!—no—not on her own account; you misunderstand me. But she never hesitates to quote the exact language of Captain Tom; an old sailor who died about a year ago. Captain Tom brought Bianca to England when she was a mere infant; picked her up in the Mediterranean."

"Oh!"

"He said."

"Exactly."

"The Duke would always wink when he said it, and call him an old 'sea dog'. Captain Tom never spoke a sentence without an oath in it; and Bianca regards everthing he uttered as so many words of Holy Writ. I dare say you wonder how such a strange young woman has become an inmate of Thrummock Hall."

"Yes; I do."

"She is the particular pet of the Duke himself. There isn't a horse in his stable he thinks so much of as he does of Bianca, and

KATE : A COMEDY

he said a horrible thing the other day; but I dare not repeat it. It would shock you."

"Shock? We American girls are immune."

"The Duke said he spent many a happy hour exchanging oaths with Captain Tom; and to hear a dear old friend in the grave swearing by proxy through such innocent lips was even better than swearing himself; he doesn't have to apologize for it to us ladies."

Kates laughter rings out suddenly, but it is checked by a glance.

"Shocking, my dear cousin-that-is-to-be—shocking, Dorothea! But do you know, I like the old Duke immensely. I could almost learn to swear myself—to have jolly times with him after I become his daughter."

Bailey comes in again at the door opening from the main hall.

"If you please, Miss Catherst, the Reverend Lord John Vernor's valet—Mr. Nesbitt, miss—he has called with a message from Mr. Lyell for Lord Jack"—

Miss Catherst looks at him suddenly and sharply.

"For Lord John. I told Mr. Nesbitt he

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

wasn't expected until half-past three; but he thought perhaps you might let him know where he is likely to find Lord John at once."

"Bring Nesbitt to me, Bailey.,"

"Yes, miss."

Bailey retires.

"Something important in parish work, I presume. Perhaps I can be of assistance to Mr. Lyell or to the Rector.

The valet steps into the room.

"I am expecting Lord John here, Nesbitt, in a few moments now. What is Mr. Lyell's message for him?"

"Mrs. Grouter has another black eye, miss."

"A black eye!"

This from Kate, startled; suddenly and with strong emphasis. The word "another" in Nesbitt's announcement explains perhaps the peaceful serenity with which Miss Catherst receives the mere repetition of news from the unfortunate Mrs. Grouter; news, as Peeler Dimples has already said, which the village frequently hears.

"A black eye?"

"Her husband has just returned to the bosom of his family, miss."

KATE : A COMEDY

"Tow Path Bill has come back from prison?"

"Yes, Miss Catherst. Mr. Lyell has taken the doctor with him and gone to comfort the woman. Lord John, I believe, expressed the wish to comfort Tow Path Bill."

Miss Hardenbeck is breathing a little more quickly than usual.

"Comfort the wretch?"

"Put him to sleep, miss."

Miss Catherst, still calm but somewhat confused, rises and crosses the room.

"I don't know what you mean, Nesbitt; put him to sleep?"

Then Kate:—

"I think I have heard that expression before and it does not always apply to a mother nursing her infant son."

"I quite understand that it is Lord John's duty as the man's pastor to meet him and try to reach his better nature if possible."

"Lord John has a very good reach, Miss Catherst; and I daresay he is looking for Tow Path Bill now."

There is a suggestion almost of brutality in the American girl as she exclaims:—

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

“I hope he will find the brute.”

“I was hoping he wouldn’t, miss; they tell me Bill Grouter is the most dangerous man and the wickedest fighter in the county.”

The half-aroused brutality of the girl gives place to a more tender feeling perhaps; for she starts nervously with a troubled expression.

“A dangerous man?”

“However, ladies, you mustn’t be discouraged. It took the Whitechapel Tiger Cat seven rounds, at Oxford, to soothe Lord John.”

“Can you understand this man, Kate?”

“Yes!—and Nesbitt! You may take a message from me to the Reverend Lord John Verner. Give him Miss Hardenbeck’s compliments; the service of Miss Catherst, I dare say, and also my own if necessary, will be quite at his disposal until he can get a trained nurse from London.”

“I’ll tell him, miss, the moment they bring him home.”

The valet disappears and Miss Catherst turns to Kate.

“What *did* you mean?”

KATE : A COMEDY

“When two men like that come together to talk about a woman’s black eye it won’t be a prayer meeting. The rector of this parish isn’t that kind of a saint. I have looked into his eyes only twice in my life, but I *know* him!”

“You have met Lord John, then?”

“This morning; and once before on the continent.”

“Indeed!”

Miss Catherst looks down a moment; then sinks into a chair, still thoughtful.

A slight, dark-haired girl, younger than either of the others, with the natural olive-tint of southern Europe, subdued to a somewhat paler hue by the softly persuasive air of England, comes into the drawing room quietly from the veranda through the bay window. She is simply dressed and has an almost demure manner except when aroused; even then the added fire is seen in the flash of her dark eyes rather than indicated by any sudden movement. Her quick southern muscles have been trained; but the influence of northern surroundings has gone no further.

“Bianca!”

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

“Miss Hardenbeck!”

“Has the Duchess driven out, Miss Dunn?”

“Yes, Miss Catherst.”

“I found a volume of poems on a seat in the lower park, under the old oak near the river; it is on the table.”

“Oh! thank you; I thought I had lost it. I went back to look for it and it was gone—thank you so much for finding it, Miss Catherst.”

The young girl speaks eagerly and with perfectly natural warmth, without thought apparently of concealing her feelings in any way, and moves to the table. She picks up a volume, looking down at it a moment tenderly, almost affectionately; then throws it open.

“I noticed that they are love-poems, Miss Dunn; by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. You have marked some of them.”

“Yes;—this one; did you read it?”

She kisses the volume; and without waiting for an answer she reads, in tones made deep and rich beyond her years by the passionate southern feeling that accompanies the thoughts of the poet, investing the

KATE : A COMEDY

words with more than they could possibly mean to a northern reader.

*Love me with thy open youth
In its frank surrender,
With the vowing of thy mouth,
With its silence tender.*

“I lent you a volume of Herbert’s religious poems.”

Bianca still reads.

*Love me with thy voice, that turns
Sudden faint above me;
Love me with thy blush, that burns
When I murmur, Love me!*

“I should be sorry, Miss Dunn, to see a blush ‘that burns’ on so young a face as yours, and love like that is not for the next world.”

Bianca answers in soft, gentle tones and with a pleasant smile.

“Captain Tom was discussing that very subject one day with the Reverend Dr. Willoughby, and he told him if he couldn’t love the woman, in Heaven, that he loved on earth, and in exactly the same way, he’d rather be damned and go to Hell with her.”

Miss Catherst starts to her feet and Kate

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

chokes over a laugh that would be highly disrespectful if it were not sternly repressed. Bianca, apparently quite unconscious of having said anything in particular, concludes her remarks:—

“Dear old Captain Tom!—he *is* in Heaven now.”

The young girl brushes tears from her eyes quickly and returns to her book; while Kate moves to Dorothea and speaks in a quiet undertone:—

“The old sea-captain does seem to live again in Bianca’s conversation, doesn’t he?”

“My cousin, Ffolliet, is waiting for me in the library to discuss a new work he brought up from London this morning: *The Relations of Man to the Universe in Modern Theology.*”

The Honorable Miss Catherst walks out with dignity and with all the stately beauty of a Grecian goddess converted to Christianity, through a large opening hung with rich portieres, which leads to other apartments and towards the library of Throckmonck Hall.

The American girl turns to her younger

KATE : A COMEDY

companion and watches her in silence a moment as she stands at the table, still reading the volume of Mrs. Browning's love-poems. It is a strange scene; everything English except the two human figures; both of them as utterly un-English as possible and utterly unlike each other, also, in race, nativity, training; in nearly every thought and nearly every emotion.

“Bianca!”

The girl looks up.

“Will you let me be your friend?”

“Friend?—you?—and I—friends!”

“Why not?”

“Of course, why not? We haven't done any harm to each other, have we?”

“Harm? I don't know what you mean.”

“Nobody here ever does know what I mean; except the dear old Duke—about the horses and the puppies.”

Kate drops upon an ottoman.

“Miss Catherst has just been telling me that Captain Tom”—

“You didn't know Captain Tom.”

A bright light from within suddenly illuminates the girl's face; she drops down with

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

the quick agility of a kitten, seizes a hassock and runs to Kate; sits at her knee.

"*My Captain Tom! You never knew him.*"

"I only knew he found an egg floating in the Mediterranean Ocean on a piece of seaweed and"—

Bianca laughs.

"And Aunt Jane Dunn hatched me out. The darling old motherly hen has been clucking the life out of her ever since, and now Miss Catherst is clucking. I suppose people understood *you* when you were growing up."

"I was only what everybody expected me to be; a commonplace society chicken chiefly interested in my own feathers."

"Nobody but Captain Tom ever knew what sort of a bird I was. Whenever he came home from a voyage we'd wander about with my hand in his; in the fields; among the hills; and we talked to each other all day long."

"Look up at me, child—straight into my eyes. Thank you, dear. It is almost the same face; it *is* the same face. Earl Catherst took me through the family portrait gallery this morning."

"I know. Everybody says that. I *must*

KATE : A COMEDY

look like her; the picture of the wild Duchess—that's what they call her—Archibald's—I mean the Earl's—great, great—ever so many greats—grandmother."

Then the girl's face moves slightly forward as if with a sudden impulse and her dark eyes look steadily into Kate's..

"You are going to be her successor as the Duchess of Mannerton."

"If the Earl and I live long enough after we are married. Well?"

"Do you love him?"

"Do I?"—

"Or are you only going to marry him?"

"I must look you up in my Bædeker."

"Your father and the Duke are talking about the marriage-settlements to-day."

"Yes; with their attorneys."

"Did you ever watch the birds in their nests? They don't have any marriage settlements nor attorneys. But they love each other in their own funny little way."

"I begin to think you've wandered out of the British Museum; there are a lot of Greek girls there, in marble."

"Here at Thrummock Hall they imagine

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

that marriage is made up by papers and all that sort of thing. Every real girl knows what marriage is; it is love—love!”

“Every *real* girl! Love!”

Kate Hardenbeck looks up and far away, through the wall of the room in which the two girls sit, and who can tell how far beyond?

“Every real girl! Upon my word, dear, you are almost compelling me to—to think; and that’s a trifle embarrassing to the kind of girl I am. Most of us young women in society get married as a matter of course; and it strikes one as odd to—to think much about it—except the trousseau of course. But to-day—to-day!—I *have* been thinking about it—about another side of marriage. Go on! Marriage is love!—to a *real* girl. Go on!”

“They call women wives that aren’t wives; and other women that are wives—they say they’re not. Marriage is love—only love—love!”

“I seem to be taking a lesson from you, my child.”

“Our fox-terrier—Aunt Jane Dunn’s—she didn’t marry the other fox-terrier because he

KATE : A COMEDY

had a pedigree, and I don't even believe he married her because she had a good supply of bones in her kennel."

Kate laughs with good-natured jollity; then suddenly looks serious again.

"I understand what you mean. It does seem as if a female human being, when she marries, ought to be on a level at least with the lower animals of her own sex; and it is only a true human passion, I suppose, that raises a woman *above* the mere brute—in—in marriage—which is love! Above—the—brute!"

She looks down silently awhile; then starts suddenly with an exclamation.

"What is it, Miss Hardenbeck?"

"Nothing—wait a moment; a great dark wave of disgust for myself passed over me."

After a few seconds more she holds herself in hand again and speaks quietly:—

"We women in America and England—some of us at least—marry serenely and coldly, and we die contentedly without knowing that such a thing as 'passion' exists—the passion that purifies all things—as fire does. You women of Greece and Italy feel the sun

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

like grapes on the vine, and you hold its warmth in your souls as well as in your bodies; that—that is to be something more than a female animal—how often we women are less!"

"I wish *I* were some nice little animal, without any such troublesome thing as a soul—I wish I were dead."

Bianca drops her head into Kate's lap, bursting into tears.

"My pet!"

"If Captain Tom were back, he'd say damn something or somebody and I should be happy again!"

"Won't you let me help you to be happy?"

"You—help me?"

"Miss Catherst has told me of the great disappointment in your life, my poor girl. It may have been only a misunderstanding and no love-tragedy need come of it. Mr. Lyell may love you as much as ever, my little dear."

Bianca straightens back looking full at Kate; then turns away from her.

"Perhaps."

The Earl Catherst, in riding costume, walks

KATE : A COMEDY

in from the veranda at the long French window; he stops as he sees Bianca and Kate. The latter:—

“Archibald! I was waiting for you. I saw you coming up the hill.”

Bianca rises to her feet; hesitates a moment; then, in a low voice, dropping her head:—

“My lord!”

“Bianca!”

She moves to the table, picks up the volume of poems and crosses the room, going out to the further apartment. The young man watches the girl until she disappears.

“I must apologize to you, Kate; I can’t ride with you this afternoon. Our respective fathers, you know, are discussing the details of our marriage-settlements; and the Duke has just sent word that he may wish to see me at any moment.”

“My groom will go with me; and Dick himself is always good company.”

“Your horse?—I dare say he’ll be quite as good company as I to-day.”

“We’re neither of us very joyful apparently.”

“On ‘this auspicious occasion,’ as they say

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

at a wedding-breakfast. Do you know, I imagine our governors aren't getting along as auspiciously as they might. The servant looked anxious; said the Duke was swearing violently when he left the room—and the American gentleman seemed to be waiting for *his* turn."

"These business matters are sometimes very irritating; and this marriage of ours is—business—of course."

"Business?"

"No; we'll call it art, dear; a comedy. Does it still interest you?"

"Is it beginning to bore you, Kate? I'm afraid I'm not playing my own part in the comedy well."

"Oh, yes!—Archibald! I should be very ungrateful if I criticized you as an amateur actor. Our 'love making' in Paris was charming. It didn't quite reach the human level of course, but"—

"The human level?"

"I think, dear, we have understood each other from the first;—we are sufficiently indifferent to live peaceably together as man and wife, so called, and our parents are ar-

KATE : A COMEDY

ranging the business side of it upstairs. But I have just been taking a lesson—from a real woman—that really loves. Her love is hopeless apparently; but I envy her—because she is capable of loving.”

“Bianca.”

“Yes. She has made me think—for the first time in my life, on that subject. Bianca has a great, throbbing woman’s heart, and she loves with all her soul! I envy her even the misery of such a love. The man who has gained it is a fool.”

“If he throws it away. You think she loves him so deeply, then?”

“I saw it in her eyes; and her very hands crushed my fingers when the word ‘love’ was on her lips. It was a call to her lover; it seems as if he *must* hear it.”

Archibald walks quietly across the room to where Bianca went out and stands looking after her.

“The Call of the Wild!”

He turns to Kate:—

“You think then that the man who throws away such a love as hers is a fool.”

“I have been looking into a true woman’s

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

heart, and I shrink from her myself with shame."

"Shame!"

"I feel degraded."

"By what, pray?"

"By our being mated—like two beasts!—and that's all we are, I suppose—not married!"

She rises to her full height as she says this and faces him with flashing eyes; awaiting calmly and firmly his reception of the protest; a woman's instinctive protest against herself and the social conditions to which she has been trained.

"Upon my soul, Kate"—

"Your soul!—don't flatter yourself—I don't."

She turns away with a laugh; slightly metallic perhaps, but brilliant, full of gayety and musical. We often hear such laughter from women in the drawing room; it goes with the furniture and the curtains and the bric-a-brac, and with a grand piano, inlaid and hand-painted.

"We won't talk about 'souls,' my dear! I have just discovered the animal in myself; healthy and well developed; rather a fine

KATE : A COMEDY

animal, on the whole—and so are you, Archie—I admire you, honestly.”

“You *are* a splendid animal, Kate!—and you never looked so magnificent as you do at this moment.”

“With my head up and my nostrils distended.”

Earl Catherst watches the woman he is engaged to marry, beautiful and almost queenly in her defiance of him, with the admiration of a man of the world; and with a certain quickening of the breath hardly defined. Two fine young animals, indeed, now face each other, and the lower part of the girl’s nature begins to re-assert the authority conferred by society in her education and training; an authority shared by her intellect but not by her heart. Into her eyes, also, still fixed on his, something now comes responsive to his admiration.

“I will sign the papers which will make me a Duchess, Archibald; but not for the title—not for the world!—if you were not also a splendid young brute like myself.”

“I am in love with you, Kate!”

He springs to her with outstretched arms.

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

There is a slight struggle, but he holds her firmly, looking into her eyes, which meet his own with a kindred flash; their nostrils dilate slightly, but with well-bred delicacy. He hardly speaks his eager wish; it is only half-whispered, scarcely more than a rapid breath; but she understands him, and coquetry, as it usually does, comes to her aid; it is every girl's "first aid" in the battle of the sexes.

"I will kiss you, Archie, when I am compelled to do so by law."

She runs by him, with the graceful spring of a young mare loose in the field; laughter instead of a neigh.

"And I dare say when I am your wife I shall enjoy it."

She stops suddenly and a look of horror comes into her face.

"Without love!"

Then, under her breath:—

"Perhaps I am low enough in the scale of animal life even for that."

She covers her face with her hands.

"Even so low a female thing as that! Marriage! What blasphemy!"

He does not hear her half-muttered words,

KATE : A COMEDY

but disgust such as Kate now feels can seldom conceal itself even among the very best bred men and women. A hard, cold look takes its natural and proper place in the countenance of the man.

"A pair of mated brutes let it be; but before we sign the paper to-day I will ask you to answer me one question."

She raises her head and looks at him. He takes the lace handkerchief from his pocket and holds it before her.

"A trifle which I gave you as a present—in Paris."

Kate receives the handkerchief.

"Your question."

"How do you regard the Reverend Lord John Vernor?"

"Before we sign the contract."

"Yes."

"When I wear your title, Earl Catherst, I shall not regard the Reverend Lord John Vernor at all."

He looks at her a moment, again drawn to her full height and regarding her steadily with eyes to which the human soul has returned.

"I will trust you, Kate."

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

"You *can* trust me; and you *must* trust me."

The servant announces:—

"Lady Sinjon-Glyn."

"Kate, my darling!"

"Fannie!"

The two women meet, embrace and kiss each other with as much ardor as if they had met yesterday for the first time instead of being old friends.

"I didn't come to see *you*, Archie."

"By-bye, Toots!"

He strolls out through the bay window lighting a cigarette.

"We haven't seen each other for ages, Kate —since winter before last in New York. But you're going to ride; I shan't keep you long; dropped in to congratulate you on marrying Bunkie."

"Bunkie?"

"Archibald Montclare de Vere Pengrue, Earl Catherst, heir to the Dukedom of Mannerston. He's a dear good fellow and I hope you'll pass him back to the rest of us women as soon as possible; we shall miss him. When will you be married?"

KATE : A COMEDY

“Next June; as now arranged.”

“In New York?”

“Of course.”

“I shall go over to the wedding.”

“And you shall drive straight from the steamer to our house, Fannie.”

“Thank you, dear—as I always have done, when the darling old Admiral has left me in New York on one of his cruises. I also dropped in to-day to see your brother-in-law-that-is-to-be, Captain Lord Ffolliet Pen-grue, of the Fourth Hussars, Queen’s Own. He came down from London with your party this morning, I understood.”

“Yes. The Captain is with Miss Catherst now in the library.”

“Whenever Ffolliet comes down from London we do a great deal of work together, for the parish; widows and orphans and things like that, you know. I suppose he and Miss Catherst are discussing theology in the library; but I shall take him away from her, on a tramp through Deptwold Forest—three new babies and two old widows on the other side of it. It will be quite dark when we return through the woods, and a wall or two to

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

climb and brooks with stepping stones; the Captain can assist me, you know. What do you think of Lord Ffolliet? Do you like him? My poor dear husband is very weak now and Ffolliet sits by his bedside for hours together. He's the greatest curiosity in London; a captain of Hussars and a devoted Christian. Of course all of our English officers are Christians officially; but Ffolliet is just as good a Christian out of his uniform as the others are in it on Sunday; he practices religion, you know, and he talks about it with as little hesitation as if he were a tradesman. He is a missionary, my dear, in the darkest purlieus of the West End drawing-rooms. Ffolliet is perfectly safe in a dimly lighted conservatory where other men go in pairs like policemen in White-chapel—to avoid the divorce courts."

The above remarks, continuous but flowing pleasantly with the musical cadence of spring water in haste; illuminated also by the sweetest of smiles, projecting flashes so to speak of colored electric light on the spray; has been accompanied by the usual pantomime of society. Miss Hardenbeck, too

KATE : A COMEDY

polite to interrupt, with no wish to do so, indeed, has waved her hand towards a small sofa and the two ladies are now sitting on opposite sides of the table.

“Oh, by the bye—have you met our dear, sweet pastor yet—the Reverend Jack?”

“I have met the Reverend Lord John Vernor once—or twice.”

“There’s another curiosity for you. Jack Vernor and Ffol ought to change places. Jack was just as anxious to get into the army as Ffol is to get out of it. And as to Lord John Vernor’s life—before he lost his fortune and took holy orders—well, my dear!—it’s almost as much a scandal to the church as Ffolliet’s piety is to the army. Why!—the very last thing before Lord Jack”—

Lady St. John-Glyn interrupts herself at last by long, sweet, infectious laughter, in which Kate is almost compelled to join without knowing anything of the matter.

“It was about a girl in Nice; at the *bal masqué*. ”

Kate leans forward suddenly, her elbows on the table, staring at her visitor, who pauses and looks at her enquiringly.

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

"Eh?"

Kate is suddenly calm again.

"Don't let me interrupt you; the—the *bal masqué* in—in Nice; it seems interesting."

"Last February; *Mardi Gras*."

"A—a girl."

"We four women, you know—Lady Betty Arden and Mallory Marshbanks—you met 'em both at my house in London; and the Countess—little Pussy Hawksbury; she was in New York when I was visiting you last time; we four women weren't in it after Jack met that girl. We were all lunching with him just after his return to London at his chambers in the Albany. We could always trust Jack with four of us at a time; watched each other in couples, you know. We got to rummaging through his place that day like so many magpies; he couldn't stop us."

Another interruption of subdued laughter, but Kate shows no tendency to join in it this time; it has ceased to be infectious to her.

"And Betty found a lovely lace handkerchief."

Kate is suddenly conscious apparently that her own cheek is resting on a handker-

KATE : A COMEDY

chief in her hand. She quietly drops that hand to her side below the edge of the table.

“Well?—what then?”

“Jack’s life wasn’t worth living after that until he confessed the whole truth to us, and he confessed a great deal more than the truth. No one woman ever had so much in her face as he confessed that woman had. It was a panorama of all the female virtues. Would you believe it?—Jack only looked into the girl’s eyes once and he was in love with her.”

“In love with her.”

“Dead.”

Kate Hardenbeck stares a few seconds longer; then turns away—and none too quickly; for a great, irresistible delight wells up from somewhere below the throat into her face; she has turned away just in time.

“He was in love with the girl, you say.”

“Desperately; and it wasn’t so much her looks either. Jack kept talking about her soul.”

The delight in Kate’s face disappears and a dull, gray feeling, almost of pain, seems to take its place; her voice comes almost in a whisper:—

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

"He assumed that she had one."

"S-O-U-L; that kind; we spelled it out for him. He raved about that part of her for a month. Jack said he looked into her eyes and through them."

"Through—her eyes!"

The distant chimes strike the second quarter. Lady St. John-Glyn looks at her watch.

"Half-past three; I must look up Ffol in the library."

"Through her eyes to her soul!"

"Eh? Oh!—that girl and Jack; her soul was away back inside of her somewhere. As for us four women, so far as Lord Jack ever discovered apparently, there isn't a soul in the bunch of us. We might as well be so many guinea pigs."

"So might she!—I dare say. But perhaps it suddenly occurred to her, one day, that even a woman like her might be something more than an animal."

"Whatever she was, Jack was awfully in love with it; and between you and me I believe he is yet. I was talking about her to him only this morning; took him back the

KATE : A COMEDY

handkerchief, with Lady Betty Arden's compliments."

Kate looks down at the handkerchief in her hand; her back half turned toward her companion.

"He tried to look indifferent and he said he'd destroy it. But I know Jack too well. His face turned crimson and then white."

Kate brings the handkerchief to her lips, pressing it against them, as she still listens.

"Jack was hard hit at Nice, and he loves that girl to-day."

Then a ring of merrier laughter than before.

"If the *bal masqué* fairy should turn up in Pengrue-Catherst and find him a clergyman, she'd dance a cancan down the centre aisle and kick off all the vestrymen's hats."

Kate springs to her feet and walks to the bay window, where she stops and looks down at the tower of the church.

"I wonder what Jack would say about the girl's soul, then, Kate."

"He only fell in love with what he imagined the woman to be."

"Of course, my dear; and it's lucky for all

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

of us women that men have such vivid imaginations."

Duly announced by Bailey, the Reverend Lord John Vernor enters the drawing-room; stops near the door as if not expecting to meet the ladies; then greets them quietly and formally.

"Jack! I'm going to the library to find Ffoliet—to help me in your parish. He's with Dorothea."

"Will you kindly tell Miss Catherst that I will join her there in a few moments?"

"Certainly."

"I have an appointment with her at this hour."

"I'll soon have Ffol away. Good-bye, Kate!"

"Good-bye, Fannie!"

"Betty and I saw Mr. Scobbun Ancott, the Duke's solicitor, and your own friend, Mr. Tenbroeck—I remember him so well in New York—he was a charming man; we saw the two lawyers driving to the Hall together. Of course we all know what that means."

"Yes; they are drawing up the marriage-settlements; with my father and the Duke."

KATE : A COMEDY

"I hope you and Archibald will be the happiest couple in the world."

The two young women kiss each other again and Lady St. John-Glyn walks out towards the library, as demure and simple as a dove and looking as harmless.

The drawing-room of Throckmonck Hall is profoundly silent. It could not be more silent if it were empty, though a man and woman stand on opposite sides of it. They are both looking down; otherwise, perhaps the man could see what he cannot hear—the rise and fall of the woman's bosom under her closely-fitting riding habit. The silence is becoming a little awkward, and he breaks it.

"Permit me, Miss Hardenbeck, to—to add my own congratulations to those of Lady Sinjon-Glyn—on—on your approaching marriage to—to my best and dearest friend."

"Thank you."

"I neglected to congratulate you this morning; but our meeting then was extremely brief."

"Very."

Lord John's heroic effort to break the sil-

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

ence has proved ineffectual, but his new profession comes to his aid.

"Do you expect to reside in Thrummock Hall after your—your marriage?"

"When we return from our wedding in New York."

"You will both be members of my own parish."

"Yes."

When hypocrisy, even the most harmless, is once assumed as a disguise there is no definite limit to it; Lord John actually puts the tips of his fingers together before him and concludes as follows:—

"Members of—of my flock."

"I shall listen to your teachings and accept your ministrations with reverence."

"Reverence?"

This word pierces Lord John's thin disguise like an unexpected shot though spoken by Kate in almost religious seriousness. He looks around at her sharply, but her eyes are still upon the floor. He turns away from her and tugs at his collar.

"With deep reverence, my pastor."

"I'm afraid our first meeting was hardly of

KATE : A COMEDY

such a nature or in such a place as to inspire in you—a—feeling which can be described accurately by the word ‘reverence.’”

“You will hereafter be my spiritual guide. I remember our first meeting to which you have referred.”

“It is a part of my own life which I am trying to forget.”

She looks up quickly and their eyes meet.

“To forget? I suppose we shall both forget it in time, with many other things in our past lives which have been—more or less—agreeable—or otherwise.”

“I have a confession to make to you, Miss Hardenbeck.”

“A confession—well?”

He moves across the room to her and speaks with simple earnestness at first; honestly, and with straightforward sincerity. There is no conscious reserve apparent of any deeper feeling on his part, and there is no coquetry in the intense interest with which she listens to him.

“You helped me that night to forget many things which I do not wish to remember; to forget what is bad in other people and

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

in myself. "We were in one of the world's recognized centres of vice; you, by accident, thinking it a place of harmless merry-making; but I was there because my past life had led me to it naturally and inevitably. I was merely standing where I had often stood before, at one of the open gates of the lower world; and the flames shone full in my face. I suddenly turned my head"—

He now forgets the reserve which he had imposed upon himself as a man and as a friend; leaning toward her and speaking unconsciously with a tone of passion in his voice:—

"And I looked into your eyes!"

Quite as unconsciously she steps towards him as she listens and they stand for a moment looking at each other, motionless.

"Surrounded by the vicious and degraded of your own sex, I saw—unexpectedly!—the soul of a true woman looking out at me!"

Kate draws back from him with a start, her eyes still fixed on his; then turns away and drops her head speaking in a whisper:—

"A true woman!"

"There was infinite rebuke in your eyes, as

KATE : A COMEDY

if the indignant purity of your whole sex were concentrated into that one glance. That is the most awful shock a man of the world can feel when he is seeking his own bestial pleasures. If I do good enough in the world hereafter to make up for the bad I've done, my better life will date from that moment."

Nothing so surely recalls a man from a *cul-de-sac* that momentry passion may have led him into, ending in dangerous shadows away from the light, so well as the utterance of a moral sentiment; especially if it be somewhat trite and commonplace.

The Reverend Lord John Verner remembers himself, but Kate does not see him do it. Still looking down and still listening, she is somewhat surprised at the calm and formal remark which follows.

"I thank you, Miss Hardenbeck."

She looks up at him quickly over her shoulder. In the same calm tone, evidently remembering his professional dignity and incidently his duty, again bringing his fingers together before him, he continues:—

"You love deeply and are about to marry my friend, Archibald Pengrue; and I"—

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

"We weren't talking about Archibald Pen-grue."

She swings away from him with an almost angry motion, he watching her. Why should a woman show pique when a man is doing the proper thing with all his might?

"Pardon me; we clergymen are apt to digress, and I am wearying you. I have acquired the habit already. It is merely my duty to add that I trust you and Archibald will both be in the family pew regularly."

"You are absolutely certain I love your nearest and dearest friend?"

He shakes his head slowly and gravely.

"I know something of your sex, Miss Hardenbeck, and I know that women like you do not marry men for any reason on earth except because they love them."

"You men understand us so perfectly."

"I have looked into your eyes and I know you."

"Are you quite sure it was a soul you saw in the interior of my person?"

He looks at her with a sharp turn of the head, and she proceeds almost sullenly with her eyes upon the floor:—

KATE : A COMEDY

"You utterly despise a woman who can promise to marry a man she does not love?"

"I have come to divide the human race into two parts—those who have souls and those who haven't. That doesn't sound quite orthodox, but I never deny the merely theoretical soul which every human being possesses. Scientists are beginning to deny their atoms but we clergymen don't. I only mean that the souls of men and women in great numbers are not sufficiently developed for any practical purpose in this life. Such a person is merely a"—

"Guinea pig."

"Exactly; that is"—

Kate begins to pat her foot.

"With the one human attribute to which I have referred; a theological atom we call a 'soul.' But we need not speak harshly even of men and women like that; we might class such people, at least, with the more dignified animals."

"Thank you."

"Eh?"

"Proceed, my—my pastor."

"A man who marries for wealth—we might

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

call him a horse, looking for oats; a woman who marries for a home—she wants a warm stable.”

“Or for a title—a crest on the harness. You *do* despise such creatures as that.”

“Oh, no! One doesn’t despise a fine animal in Hyde Park or on a breeding farm.”

Kate begins to twist her handkerchief tightly; her teeth set firmly.

“And even a human being, Miss Hardenbeck, born on a low scale of moral intelligence, just above the animals shall we say?—can hardly be held responsible to our own higher laws.”

“Ah!”

A short vicious cry. Kate tears the handkerchief to shreds, scattering the fragments, and swings to the window, looking out over the veranda. He stares at her in astonishment and she turns on him with almost the glare of a savage woman.

“You may despise *me*, Lord John Vernor!”

“What do you mean?”

“I will tell you the truth. I don’t know why I should; you are not my father-confessor—and I don’t want to tell you; but I can’t help

KATE : A COMEDY

it; I will tell you the truth. Archibald and I have never loved each other and we do not pretend to. You can give us credit for honesty at least; what animal are we like? None! We are beneath them."

"Think better of what you are saying."

"It is a relief to speak of it. That's the reason I am telling you, I suppose. Archibald and I understand each other perfectly and we shall sign the contract to-day. It is to his interest and it fulfills my ambition."

"I shall never again believe what I see in a woman's eyes."

"It is not wise, Lord John."

"I do despise you—both."

There is all the bitterness in his tone of a man who loves a woman; he would not lose his courtesy to a woman he did not love. Kate starts with a rigid tremor, as if he had struck her with his fist. Her breath comes heavily, but there is no tremor in her voice when she finally speaks—only a rising emphasis, stronger as she goes on, and her tone is colder.

"I have a favor to ask of you. I resemble other women, the best of them, in one respect at least; none of us like contempt.

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

Give me something better! Hate me! We are hardly well enough acquainted for me to ask that honor; it is almost a familiarity on my part. But we met, as you have said, at one of the gates of the lower world with the flames shining full in our faces, and hatred seems appropriate for us. Let us part with that! Give me something better than your contempt—we hate each other!"

She strikes her skirt viciously with her riding-crop and hurries out through the bay window to the veranda. He moves to the window and looks after her.

Bailey comes in from the hall on the other side of the room.

"Lord John!—Policeman Dimps is waiting to speak with you, at the door from the lower park—about Tow Path Bill."

"His wife!"

Lord John Vernor's head turns sharply towards the servant and his previous humor readily lends itself now to a brutal expression.

"Another black eye?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Say to Miss Catherst that I am suddenly called away on parochial duty."

KATE : A COMEDY

The servant crosses the room, but turns for any further instructions."

"Tell her that one of my parishoners needs my immediate attention."

He moves straight towards the door with a firm stride and an expression on his face of an under-shot bulldog aroused to sudden interest in one of his own race.

As Lord John disappears, Bailey turns and goes out in the opposite direction, merely hesitating to bow respectfully and pass on, as a guest at Throckmonck Hall comes in rapidly from the further apartment; he is followed by another, walking more slowly and more calm in his manner. The former crosses the room and stops suddenly; he is biting the end of an unlit cigar. This mode of expressing externally the inner emotions of a man under trying circumstances would proclaim him a native American citizen in any corner of the world.

"Tenbroeck! That Dook upstairs is a fool!"

"I think we can arrange matters, Mr. Hardenbeck."

"I begin to doubt whether this marriage

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

of our two youngsters will come about after all."

A tall gray-haired woman in a rich costume, stately, dignified, simple, comes in from the hall.

"Ah, Duchess!"

"Mr. Hardenbeck!"

"Mr. Franklin Tenbroeck, of New York—my attorney. This is the Dook's wife."

"Your Grace!"

"We were expecting you, Mr. Tenbroeck. I'm afraid your own good wife is a little upset this afternoon, Mr. Hardenbeck. We have been driving and she hurried to her apartments at once on our return."

"Yes, poor old girl!—these marriage-settlements and contracts. It was different in Denver when mother and I fell in love. We just got married and that was all there was of it. I had ninety-seven dollars in the savings bank and mother had three dresses and a new bonnet. One day, a little girl-baby came to lie on the pillow between us in the cottage; and that's what mother is worrying about now, Duchess."

"I can sympathize with her."

KATE : A COMEDY

"She has told me a dozen times that your boy and our girl really love each other."

"That, of course, is desirable."

"She watched them making love in Paris. So did I; but I'm not up in the way they do it now; and as to trying to understand my girl, I never know whether a woman means what she says or something else or nothing at all, except mother. But it's all right, I suppose."

"You and the Duke, I trust, have had a pleasant day together, arranging matters for our dear children."

"M—m—well! It's been an interesting day."

"Undoubtedly. Mr. Tenbroeck! The Duke and I will be glad if you can make your home at Thrummock Hall during your stay in England."

"Thank you; but I am holding myself in readiness to start for New York at a moment's notice."

"I am sorry."

Passing him with a pleasant smile and a graceful inclination of the head; she leaves them together. The unlit cigar of Mr. Erastus

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

G. Hardenbeck, of Denver and New York, resumes its national functions between his teeth.

"The Dook and I had a monkey and parrot time together before you and his solicitor joined us."

"I was surprised to learn that you had taken up the matter at all before my arrival. In my first letter from New York I wrote you frankly that it would require a very large amount of money to arrange the marriage of an American heiress with the son of a great European nobleman like the Duke of Mannerton."

"He wants the Earth. I might give him the western hemisphere; if it weren't for the Monroe Doctrine."

Mr. Tenbroeck drops into the chair at the table; a slight man, with iron-gray hair tending to white; a firmly set mouth, but every feature delicate; a man of well-controlled power apparently in intellect and character.

"It is evident to me, Hardenbeck, that you don't understand the situation."

"I told the Dook before you came that I'd put up twenty-five thousand dollars if he'd

KATE : A COMEDY

put up the same and we'd start the young folks off with a boom."

"M—m."

"And I promised I'd give his son a clerkship in one of my railroad offices, to work up from; he isn't in any business now."

Mr. Tenbroeck laughs; his client proceeds.

"I thought I'd exploded a bomb-shell under the Dook. After that we entertained each other with reciprocal profanity until you and Ancott came in."

"We will discuss millions of dollars in this settlement, not thousands."

"Wh—a—t! Are you the Dook's attorney or mine?"

"Neither; I am Kate's. I wrote you that also in my last letter. She has been my little pet from her childhood. I am *her* attorney; and Kate's mother told me she hoped you'd be as liberal as possible with the young people."

Hardenbeck stands a moment in thought; then drops upon the sofa opposite Tenbroeck; still thinking.

"Mother said the same thing to me. But look here, Tenbroeck; you talk about millions

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

of dollars in these settlements; what do I pay you twenty thousand dollars a year for as a retainer?—besides a big fee for every case?"

"For honest advice."

"That's a fact; and you are worth it to me. You are the only man in New York I can hire to tell me, about once in three months, that I'm an infernal scoundrel; and legal advice like that helps keep one of us multi-millionaires out of the penitentiary. I appreciate your services. Now I suppose you're going to tell me I'm a miserly old skinflint. Very well; put it in your next bill. We've got to talk about millions, you say."

"For Kate."

The multi-millionaire is thoughtful for some moments before he speaks.

"For Kate and mother!"

He rises quietly and walks partly across the room.

"You must meet the natural and proper obligations of your great wealth. You would like to be liberal, Hardenbeck; for you are a man of brains. But you can't be, without my help."

KATE : A COMEDY

"I was five years saving up that first ninety-seven dollars; and it was a hard school."

"You have one good quality."

"That isn't a long list; you may read it."

"You love your wife and your daughter devotedly."

"Yes!"

"And no one else."

"No other human being on earth."

"That is *not* one of your good qualities. I'll make a note now of the total amount for these settlements; we can arrange the details afterwards."

Tenbroeck takes a notebook from his pocket and rises.

"Shall we say two million dollars?"

"Two million!"

"You made twice that amount yesterday in one turn of the New York market. It is for Kate."

"For Kate and mother."

The attorney writes in his notebook.

"Three millions!"

"Hold on! You said two!"

"Shall I make it five?"

"Not a dollar more; keep it at three."

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

Here comes the Dook—and Ancott—I'm glad they've interrupted us; you'd have had it ten millions."

A large man with a heavy tread enters the drawing-room. He is that curious but frequent anomaly of human nature in Europe, a "gentleman" by birth and a "tough" by personal choice and life-long association. His face is heavy; his eyelids are heavy, shading a heavy outlook of the eyes; everything about him is "heavy," until he speaks; then, a soft, sweet voice and a genial smile; a manner gentle and courteous. Back of him comes a little man in a black frock coat—one knows instinctively that a smooth silk hat is waiting in the hall to go with the coat; a precise, firm, accurate man; a man whose undoubted and eminent respectability is recognized by every one at the first glance. The Duke himself is in a rough, long-worn riding suit and he pounds into the room with the easy swing of a butcher at home.

"Our conversation was broken off very abruptly, Mr. Hardenbeck."

"I'm afraid my last few remarks were a little too emphatic, Dook."

KATE : A COMEDY

"Don't mention it; I haven't had such a good time since Captain Tom died; an old friend of mine; we used to swear together. Shall we go through the stables? I've a fine lot of racing colts coming on."

Mr. Tenbroeck intervenes.

"We are now prepared to finish our conference."

"Oh! Very well. We'll begin where we left off. Mr. Hardenbeck and I had sent each other to the infernal regions; we will recall ourselves!"

"Pardon me, your Grace!"

"Well, Ancott?"

"I must catch the first possible train back to London, and we will lose as little time as we can on any superfluous words that do not have a legal bearing on the case."

The Duke drops upon the sofa and Mr. Hardenbeck into an armchair on the opposite side of the room. Mr. Ancott clears his throat with professional dignity and precision.

"We were discussing the great antiquity of my august client's family and the dignity of our ducal rank. I still claim that these

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

considerations must be duly recognized by Mr. Hardenbeck in the form of a special dower for his daughter before we can proceed to consider the joint settlements."

"A bonus from me for your title, Dook, and that underground property."

"Underground?"

"Your ancestors. If they aren't underground and don't keep there I won't have anything to do with 'em,. There *is* a difference in our families, Dook. I started life as a boy of all work on a canal; kicked by the Captain and by the mule on the tow-path; they were both my social superiors. While I was communing with the hind legs of that mule I never dreamed that I should be raised so high in the world some day. I am short of ancestors, and I'll do the square thing. Call it five thousand dollars extra to my girl for the family graveyard."

Mr. Ancott is aroused.

"Absurd, sir! Ridiculous! We will drop the whole matter."

"Call the marriage off; all right."

Mr. Tenbroeck moves to his client and speaks to him quietly apart from the others.

KATE : A COMEDY

After the consultation Mr Hardenbeck speaks across to the Duke and his attorney.

"Five thousand dollars isn't enough for the girl's dowry."

Then with an incidental wave of his hand:—

"Call it half a million."

Mr. Scotchburn Ancott drops back into the chair at the table.

"Now for the rest of this trade—the joint endowments. We'll get on with the business."

"Really, my dear Hardenbeck; you must pardon me—but the words 'trade' and 'business' in connection with the marriage of our children seem objectionable."

Mr. Hardenbeck does not hear this, being again in consultation with his attorney.

"Two millions altogether, you said."

Mr. Tenbroeck shows him a page in his notebook.

"Oh, yes; three."

Then, across to the Duke:—

"I will settle two million and a half dollars on the young people if you will do the same. Is it a bargain?"

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

"‘Bargain.’ Can’t we avoid the language of the counting room and the market?”

“We’ll talk poetry if you prefer it. My chips are on the table; will you see the pile?”

“That is *not* the language of trade, and it interests me. One hundred thousand guineas better.”

The American multi-millionaire stares suddenly at the English nobleman; rises and beckons Tenbroeck to return to him; he speaks, confidentially:—

“What have I struck?”

“The most reckless plunger on the turf of England.”

“And *I* can make the New York Stock exchange sit up on its hind legs and howl. Half a million dollars on top of that, Dook.”

“I will cover that amount.”

This, quietly and with a smile as if it were a matter of daily custom. Ancott is watching his noble client keenly and with anxiety, but he remains silent.

Mr. Hardenbeck crosses the room.

“Dook! You’re a thoroughbred.”

The Duke rises and takes his extended hand.

KATE : A COMEDY

“We begin to understand each other.”

National boundaries have disappeared; the two men are no longer strangers; and they walk to the bay window chatting together intimately and pleasantly. The staid English solicitor is at work with his notebook and pencil; but he seems bewildered.

“I am a little confused about the exact figures.”

Hardenbeck looks back over his shoulder.

“Half a million dollars in the Kitty for me; then I put two millions and a half on the table. The Dook raised me a hundred thousand guineas and I shoved it up another half million dollars. He called.”

“Quite right, Ancott.”

This ready assurance from his ducal client does not clear up matters for the solicitor.

“I don’t understand these American business terms.”

Mr. Tenbroeck comes to his rescue.

“I will explain them to you.”

“Thank you. With your permission, Duke, I will now send for the Earl Catherst and Miss Hardenbeck.

“Certainly; the marriage contract?”

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

Mr. Ancott strikes the bell on the table and proceeds:—

“The settlement papers between yourself and Mr. Hardenbeck are contingent of course on the signing of that document. It will advance our work as attorneys if they sign it at once, and it will save the young people an appointment in town.”

The servant steps in.

“Ask the Earl and Miss Hardenbeck if they will kindly join us in the drawing room.”

“I saw his lordship in the garden with Miss Dunn, sir, a moment ago; but I think Miss Hardenbeck may be riding.”

The Duke:—

“Let us know, Bailey. Speak to the Duchess, also; and I suppose Mrs. Hardenbeck”—

“No, we won’t disturb mother. She’s upstairs crying, I suppose; enjoying herself.”

As the servant passes out with his messages Bianca Dunn comes in quickly; almost running. She stops abruptly, looking from one to the other, and her eyes finally rest on the Duke.

“Bianca, my pet!”

He moves to her and drops his great arm

KATE : A COMEDY

about her as gently as if he were handling a kitten.

“What is it, Tommy-girl? You have something to say to us.”

“Miss Hardenbeck”—

Mr. Hardenbeck steps near to them.

“What about Kate?”

“Your daughter is perfectly safe, sir.”

“Safe!—that means danger.”

“Her groom—has returned—alone.”

“What did he tell you?”

“He left her down at Tow Path Bill’s cottage, at the foot of the Park, by the river.”

Mr. Hardenbeck turns quickly and hurries to the large window opening to the veranda; he stops suddenly as he looks out.

“Here is the girl now, coming up the hill.”

The anxious father disappears on the veranda, and Tenbroeck looks after him.

“Kate is walking!—without her horse; but she seems perfectly well.”

The Duke is now deeply interested.

“Did the groom lead her horse home, Bianca?”

“No—he had only his own.”

“I feel anxious about that horse; perhaps

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

he's hurt. But he may be taking a flyer on his own account. Nothing would have happened to him, if you'd been on his back, my darling. You can ride all the animals in my stable better than any man of them there, and you're as much a pet with my horses as you are with me, you rogue!"

He has moved to the sofa with her and dropped upon it; bringing her head to his breast tenderly.

"Hardenbeck brought that horse from Kentucky; a fine animal!"

Kate walks in at the window, followed by her father, and there is a moment's silence—all looking at her inquiringly.

"Tell us what happened, Kate."

"The Reverend Lord John Vernor is seriously injured."

Bianca raises her head from the Duke's breast. He inquires with some interest:—

"Does he need our attention?"

"No; the Doctor was already at the cottage when we took him there."

"What about your horse?"

"My horse is dead."

"Ah! I was afraid it was serious."

KATE : A COMEDY

"Go on, Kate, my girl, we want it all—at once."

"I was at the turn of the road where it rises above the river at the shoulder of the hill; just at the foot of the Park, here. There were two men before me; one of them was Lord John Vernor; the other a rough, brutal looking man, very angry and talking loudly. He turned suddenly and attacked Lord John."

The Duke, quietly:—

"Where did Jack hit him?"

"I only saw the man roll over in a lifeless heap on the road."

"Solar plexus."

The Duke is patting Bianca on the cheek; he kisses her, and continues:—

"It might have been back of the ear or on the tip of the jaw. But how did Jack himself get hurt?"

"My horse was backing with me at the very edge of the rocks."

"My girl!"

"It was nothing, father, so far as I was concerned. I was simply lifted from my saddle and placed gently on the ground; but the bridle-rein became entangled with Lord

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

John's arm as he was lifting me. The poor beast dragged him down over the rocks and he was thrown partly under the horse as it fell. He is now lying in the cottage of the man he struck; wounded and with a high fever. The physician told us he was not fatally hurt, but it would be serious."

Archibald comes in from the veranda, through the bay window.

"I saw you walking up the hill, Kate; your groom came back without you."

The eminently respectable English solicitor has been devoted to his notebook and complicated figures through all that has passed; but he now arouses himself with sudden interest.

"I trust you will pardon my apparent haste, but we were waiting for his lordship and Miss Hardenbeck to sign the marriage-contract."

Kate Hardenbeck starts and Bianca rises; she stands looking off, at nothing. Archibald has his eyes fixed upon her, and Kate's eyes, like Bianca's, are also fixed on nothing, firmly and steadily, as she half articulates:—

"To sign—the—the"—

The Duchess of Mainwarton moves into

KATE : A COMEDY

the room and to Kate, with her own quiet, graceful dignity. She kisses Kate's forehead.

“My daughter!”

Her Grace then turns away and drops into an armchair. Kate is still looking steadily before her.

“The marriage—contract!”

Mr. Ancott has brought an inkstand and pens from a desk in a corner of the great room; he and Mr. Tenbroeck have exchanged two legal documents, glancing them over hurriedly yet with professional care. They are spread upon the table.

“At this line, my lord.”

The Earl Catherst drops into a chair at the table and signs one of the papers.

“This one also, please.”

He signs the duplicate and rises, extending his arm and offering the pen to Kate. Tenbroeck calls her attention gently.

“Kate, my dear!”

There is a pause, all looking at Kate. She is motionless. The Duchess relieves at last a silence which becomes almost embarrassing.

“This is a doubly interesting day at Thrumbury,”

LOVE AND LEGAL DOCUMENTS

mock Hall. Our dear niece, Dorothea, has just announced to me her engagement, subject to our consent of course, to our Rector, the Reverend Lord John Vernor."

Kate turns her head sharply and looks at the Duchess. The Duke is aroused to almost as much interest as if his niece were one of his own horses.

"Oh!—has she? Dolly's goodness is a trifle chilly; virtue *frappé*, so to speak; but she'll make a good parson's wife; just the kind of a woman Jack needs, too. I never miss a service when I'm at home, and Jack won't forget 'em any more."

Kate draws off her right glove slowly; turns and takes the pen from Archibald's hand. She sits at the table and signs the marriage contract.

Archibald looks over her at Bianca, who stands with her back to them both; her eyelids fall wearily.

ACT III

—
STRONGER THAN LAW
OR RITE

ACT THIRD

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

THE younger man starts suddenly to his feet as an unexpected word applied to himself strikes his ear. The man who has just uttered the word also rises quietly and looks firmly into the young man's eyes. It is now evening, and the drawing room of Throckmonck Hall is lighted rather dimly by two lamps with a few wax candles here and there in ancient brass sconces. The general light is only strong enough to make the figures on the old tapestry, hardly discernible in the daytime, mere apparitions haunting the place. The curtains of the long window are partially drawn and one side of the French casement stands partly open to the mild air of an occasional October evening in rural England. The weather-stained figures on the veranda now seem more like un-

KATE : A COMEDY

material sentinels guarding the apparitions within than respectable old ladies and gentlemen of solid marble. The scene beyond, clear in the light of the moon, is peaceful and absolutely silent, unless a quick ear may catch the splash of the river at the foot of the Park.

Mr. Ancott and Earl Catherst have been seated at the table with after-dinner coffee, discussing an important subject apparently, for both have seemed very serious; Archibald's eyes on the floor, his head turned away; hardly listening, yet hearing. The remarks of Mr. Ancott, ending with the word above referred to, were as follows:—

“The firm of Ancott, Scobbun and Ancott, your lordship, have been the family solicitors of the Dukes of Mannerton for six generations. In the present generation I constitute that firm, and I trust your lordship, as the heir of the dukedom, will understand that I speak in a strictly professional capacity when I assure you, my lord, that your lordship is a fool.”

Archibald Montclare de Vere Pengrue, Earl Catherst, heir of the Dukedom of Main-

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

warton, and Mr. Scotchburn Ancott stand facing each other across the table. The solicitor proceeds, looking firmly at the young nobleman:—

“My late uncle, Mr. Fergus Scob bun, was knocked down by your father for making a similar remark; and one of my distant ancestors received his death-blow from your own ancestor under the same circumstances. You are a fool.”

“I quite agree with you, Mr. Ancott.”

They bow gravely to each other and resume their seats.

“You suggest, my lord, that I shall assist you to postpone your union with the daughter of a multi-millionaire.”

“Indefinitely; yes—break it off.”

“Three weeks after the marriage-contract has been signed, and after settlements amounting on both sides to a million and a half pounds sterling have been concluded. You wish to sacrifice all that?”

“I am a fool, you see.”

“Again speaking with due respect for your exalted rank, permit me to say that you are more of a fool than you imagine you are, my

KATE : A COMEDY

lord. The future of your whole family as well as your own future, and the fate of the dukedom itself, are at stake on this marriage. Your father, the present duke, is on the verge of bankruptcy."

"Is it so bad as that?"

"Worse. His losses on the turf for the last five years have been overwhelming; and they are debts of honor, which *must* be paid whether a nobleman's honest debts are paid or not."

"So much depends on this marriage, then?"

"You are surprised; especially in view of the fact that we agreed with Mr. Hardenbeck on a very large joint endowment. The Duke hasn't a penny in the world to meet that new obligation. But I allowed him to proceed in the transaction in his usual headlong manner because the amount of cash assumed by Mr. Hardenbeck will relieve enough property to meet our immediate promises; and with an American financial magnate as your father-in-law I can extend our credits sufficiently to re-establish the whole property in a long term of years. Our largest creditors were already impatient and threatening when

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

the articles of settlement were signed. Since then I have arranged with the most dangerous of them and I hope to do so with the remainder, in time. Even you, surely, must see'—

"Even such a hopeless fool as I have been!"

"Even you, my lord. You must see that any postponement of this marriage—to say nothing of a final break—is extremely perilous in such a crisis."

The young man thinks long and seriously.

"Ancott! When I put my signature to that contract three weeks ago I had a right to sign it."

"What do you mean?"

"I am now trying to solve this problem; any gentleman may be a fool, but is there any definition of the word 'blackguard' that leaves me out? I appeal to you as a young man to an older man; not as my legal adviser but as a human being."

"I am not at liberty to speak in that capacity."

"I have given another woman the right to be known to the world as my wife."

"A secret marriage?"

KATE : A COMEDY

“No; I am not a coward as well as a fool; nor a villain—by nature. I make no distinction in my own mind between a moral right and a legal one; only a scoundrel does that, I believe—except as an attorney for some one else.”

“The right to be known as your wife—is it in writing?”

“Bah! That question is an insult—even from a lawyer—please not ask it again. I have given her a stronger right to demand my love—forever!—than anything written on paper could give her, or any ceremony.”

“There has been no ceremony.”

“Cut that!—it has nothing to do with the matter.”

“Except from a legal point of view; and that is all I have to consider. The usual custom of your class under such circumstances”—

“Is to make a proper ‘settlement’ on the poor girl, like a ‘gentleman’—and be rid of her. I know what is in your strictly legal mind; I can secure ample means from the fortune of one woman to support another woman.”

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

He rises, turns away and lights a cigar; the natural action of a man who finds himself confronted by a difficult problem and no solution in his mind; especially a man who has usually allowed the problems of life to have their own way without worrying about them. The more customary cigarette is inadequate to this occasion. The solicitor also rises again, walks across the room and turns.

"Your lordship—Earl Catherst! The social principles and the morality of my own class are definite and well settled. I do not presume, however, to express any opinion as to your class. I do not presume even to form an opinion, my lord."

"Is it absolute ruin to my whole family and to the dukedom? Do not answer me lightly."

"Absolute ruin and misery to you all. Beggary!—as near, that is, to actual beggary as people of your class are ever allowed by Providence to come; postmortem debts and borrowing from friends for a scanty and wretched livelihood. I am giving you the exact facts as the attorney of your family in the sixth generation."

KATE : A COMEDY

“I told you I was trying to solve a problem; you have solved it for me. I *am* a black-guard.”

He strolls out through the bay window into the moonlight, still smoking. Mr. Ancott takes a notebook from his pocket and is running over the leaves as the servant comes in with a tray, to remove the relics of after-dinner coffee.

“Bailey! Please ask Miss—Miss”—

He looks up and down a page of his memoranda for a name unfamiliar to him.

“Miss Bianca Dunn—if she will kindly see me in this room.”

“Yes, sir!”

Mr. Ancott again devotes himself to his *vade-mecum*, dropping into a chair, and the servant turns to the cups and saucers.

A young man in full evening dress, having the long drooping moustache which is part of an English officer’s uniform—and the only part he ever wears, in times of peace, when he can avoid doing so—comes into the room.

“Ah! Bailey! You may—may”—

The servant turns to him respectfully and waits; while the new-comer strokes the long

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

drooping moustache slowly. An English officer always does this, especially when he is somewhat in haste, before completing a sentence he has begun. While he is thus fulfilling a sacred duty of his profession, almost a military regulation, with the nervous impatience of a huge St. Bernard dog basking in the sun, the Reverend Lord John Vernor follows him into the drawing-room. One arm is supported by a loop of black silk around the neck, but it is evidently convalescent and leaves the sling from time to time, returning to it for occasional rest rather than as a necessity. Bailey is still waiting for orders before finishing his work at the table.

“You may say to the Duchess that I am ready, please.”

“Yes, Lord Ffolliet.”

“Where is”—

This starter of another sentence is addressed to Mr. Ancott, who looks up and waits patiently for the rest of it.

“Where is Archibald, Ancott? He left us all in the dining room to take his coffee with you, here.”

KATE : A COMEDY

“His lordship has just strolled out on the veranda.”

“We’ll join him, Ffolliet, for another cigar. Where are the ladies, Bailey? I shall be glad to see Miss Catherst, if she is at leisure.”

“The ladies retired to their own apartments, Lord John, immediately after dinner. I’ll tell Miss Catherst you wish to see her.”

“Kindly speak to Miss Dunn, at once, Bailey—I must catch the next train back to London; it’s the last to-night.”

“I’m quite ready to go with the Duchess, Bailey.”

The servant escapes. The Captain of Hussars makes another false start.

“Dorothea told me”—

Lord John Verner occupies his leisure in lighting a new cigar.

“Dorothea told me she was going to the prayer-meeting again at Tow Path Bill’s cottage. Mr. Lyell is coming here to accompany her.”

“I’m sorry I can’t go with them myself, but I’m not quite up to it yet.”

“Queer about”—

The first match is a failure and Lord John

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

has time to wait again for the captain of Hussars to stroke his moustache.

"Queer about Tow Path Bill and his prayer meetings, isn't it, Jack?"

"He is my first and only convert to Christianity."

"He was"—

"The very worst sinner in Pengrue-Catherst; yes."

The social equals of Captain Lord Ffolliet Pengrue and his fellow English officers do not hold themselves under obligation to wait for a postponed sentence; they usually fill it in themselves at their own discretion and the world seldom knows exactly what the officers intend to say.

"You"—

"I reached the man's soul; that is, I came as near to it as I dared—tip of the jaw, you know."

"Did Tow Path Bill"—

"As soon as I was well enough Bill appeared in my room; it was before they removed me from his cottage. He assured me that a blow such as I gave him was enough to make a good Christian of any man

KATE : A COMEDY

on earth; and then he dropped to his knees at my bedside and prayed. The poor fellow knows only one strictly religious word—Amen—and he hasn't the slightest idea which end of a prayer it belongs to. But Tow Path Bill is in deadly earnest. To my certain knowledge he has pounded four mill-hands into salvation already, and he apparently expects to convert the rest of the village in the same way. At one of his meetings, Mr. Lyell tells me, they heard a cry outside. Bill jumped off his knees and rushed from the cottage; dragged a half-drunken wretch out of the water and then shook his fist in the man's face. 'You come in here and pray with the rest of us,' he said, 'or I'll chuck you back into the river.'"

Lord John has laughed gently but with kindly sympathy as he has thus recounted his own experiences with his first and only convert and what he has heard of his enthusiastic exertions on behalf of Christianity. Lord Ffolliet has listened without a smile. He has merely stroked his professional moustache.

"Your method of missionary work inter-

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

ests me very⁴ much, Jack. I have fully decided, you know, to throw up my commission in the Hussars and take holy orders."

"I wish I could take your commission when you give it up."

"I shall"—

"But that's quite out of the question, of course."

"I shall probably go to Africa as a missionary, and your system of conversion may be useful to me. We Englishmen in Central Africa shoot down half the tribe and then convert the other half; but your individual process"—

"Try it, Ffol; perhaps your fellow officers will leave you a few souls to save."

"I'm—I'm a very good boxer myself, you know."

Bailey returns.

"Her Grace wishes me to say that the carriage is already at the door and she will join you at once, Lord Ffolliet. Miss Catherst is preparing to go out with Mr. Lyell, but she will see you presently, Lord John. Miss Dunn is coming, Mr. Ancott."

Bailey retires.

KATE : A COMEDY

“The mother and I”—

“The young widow again?”

“The Duchess and I are going to pay a visit of condolence to poor Lady Sinjon-Glyn. The good old Admiral, Sir William, died and was buried while you were confined to your room.”

“Nearly two weeks ago.”

“Lady Sinjon-Glyn has assured my mother that our visits are a source of great consolation to her.”

Lord Ffolliet moves toward the door and Mr. Ancott takes his eyes from the notebook.

“Sir William Sinjon-Glyn left a large fortune, I understand.”

“In spite of”—

Captain Lord Ffolliet Pengrue becomes unusually thoughtful and there is profound silence, as the hirsute soliloquy continues, before he goes on.

“In spite of that burden, his fair young widow is bearing her grief with saintly fortitude. She is an angel of sweetness and purity.”

He walks out in deep thought.

“I didn’t have an opportunity at dinner,

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

Lord John, to congratulate your lordship on your recovery."

"Thank you, Mr. Ancott."

"They tell me you came very near to the point of death at one time."

"The doctor did give me up one day, but that was a fortnight ago. I'm all right now—with a little care."

"This is the first evening you have been out, I understand, since the day you saved Miss Hardenbeck's life."

"I?—saved her life? I must have done it in my sleep. So far as I can remember I merely lifted that young woman off the saddle, and in my effort to get her feet instead of her head on the ground my arm became entangled in the bridle. She probably saved *my* life—by remaining at the top. If she and the horse had both tumbled on me I should have been done for. Bianca, my dear!"

He turns to Bianca as she comes in.

"We were all in danger of losing our dinner to-night on your account. The Duke positively refused to allow anyone else to sit in the chair at his side."

Bianca laughs pleasantly

KATE : A COMEDY

“And he declined to go on with the meal, at all, until you were summoned.”

“The dear old Duke!”

“Bailey told you, Miss Dunn, that I wished to see you.”

“Yes, Mr. Ancott.”

Lord John is looking at Bianca with interest, and he approaches her.

“My sweet little pet!”

Patting her under the chin.

“So you are the ‘baby-imp’ that Archibald and I used to play with; you weren’t more than two years old then. But I’ll not interrupt your consultation with your solicitor. I’ll finish my cigar with Archibald on the veranda.”

When Lord John has disappeared, Bianca turns to the attorney.

“What is it, Mr. Ancott?”

“Be seated, please, Miss Dunn.”

She drops into an armchair. Mr. Ancott walks across the room deliberately, stops before her and looks down into her face with the hard, inevitable gaze of a lawyer about to ask questions and say something disagreeable. If he intends the gaze to be discon-

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

certing, as lawyers usually do when seeking for the truth or the reverse, he has made the same mistake perhaps that a serpent might make; fixing its eyes on a bird attached to the top of a woman's hat left on the grass at a picnic. A serpent under such circumstances might find a concealed hatpin when he had finally decided that his victim had been duly fascinated. Bianca, of course, is anything but a stuffed bird, but she is nearly as quiet, and she looks up at the rather formidable lawyer with a half-smiling expression; then simply drops her eyes and waits.

"In the pursuit of my professional labors, I held a consultation this afternoon with the Honorable Miss Dorothea Catherst, at her own request."

"At her request."

"She told me she had sent for me because it was her duty to speak frankly. After that interview I made a memorandum in my notebook as follows."

He reads from the book.

Bianca Dunn. Enquire further as to her relations with the Earl.

"Miss Catherst said it was her duty?"

KATE : A COMEDY

"Her sad duty as a Christian woman."

"Well?"

"I will also read another memorandum."

Afterwards consulted with Lord Ffolliet Pengrue. Asked Lord Ffolliet why Miss Dunn was permitted to remain at Throckmonck Hall. He answered: If anyone ventured to suggest that Bianca should leave the Hall, he or she would probably become the Duke of Mainwarton's—

Mr. Ancott's notes fail him apparently at this point, but he has merely turned two leaves by mistake and turning back to the right leaf he concludes the memorandum:—*he or she would probably become the Duke of Mainwarton's next meal.*

Bianca gives way to a merry fit of laughter.

"I love the Duke as much as he loves me."

"This is no laughing matter, Miss Dunn; but I quite understand the powerful protection you have in Thrummock Hall. I may even say as a matter of fact—a fact of which I must take due cognizance as his solicitor—that you are nestling in the very heart, so to speak, of the Duke of Mannerton. Nevertheless, I am the professional adviser of this family and I shall speak frankly."

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

He emphasizes the silence which follows by placing a chair and sitting before her. He looks into her eyes sternly; then speaks deliberately and with unerring accuracy of emphasis:—

“I have learned the relations which you now hold to the Duke’s elder son and his heir, Archibald Pengrue, Earl Catherst.”

There is another brief silence, and a strange expression begins to light up the girl’s face; not such an expression as a lawyer might naturally expect.

“Archibald and I are the only two people in all the world that really love each other.”

The solicitor takes a little time to think, but soon recovers his professional poise and manner.

“That fact may interest you, Miss Dunn; but”—

“We didn’t dream that anyone else knew it. Oh!—to think that anything less than what we feel should ever be called ‘love.’ ”

“I dare say. But there are certain conventions of social life which seem to have escaped your attention.”

“Even when I try not to show my love he

KATE : A COMEDY

only knows it all the better. He never saw so much love in my eyes as when I was hiding it from him."

"Precisely; but as I was saying"—

"And yet I don't love him half as much as I think; I should die if I did. I do so pity the poor women that cannot love as I do. How they must envy us women who can!"

"As I remarked before, I am the professional adviser of this family; and"—

"You mustn't think I love Archibald merely because he loves me; it's only because I can't help it; and Oh!—how I thank him for the gentle feeling that steals over me when I am in his arms—the eagerness that springs into my heart! I owe to him the *joy* of loving him!"

"You interrupt me. You are not the wife of the Earl Catherst."

"I *am* his wife!"

Starting to her feet. The astute solicitor sits back in his chair watching her and a momentary shadow of anxiety crosses his face.

"And I only! I shall always be his wife, living or dead! He will never meet again

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

with such adoration, and that makes wifehood; it is love only—nothing else—that makes a woman a wife."

Mr. Ancott looks relieved.

"All the rest is nothing."

"You have yielded"—

A look of triumphant womanhood comes into her face that one seldom sees except in pictures of the old masters, and in only a few of them.

"I have sacrificed my life to him; is not that happiness enough for one woman?"

"Will you kindly be seated again?"

Bianca sinks back into the chair.

"Now listen to me! Your acquaintance with my distinguished client has resulted in your ruin."

The look of exaltation is still bright on the girl's face.

"Bless him!"

Mr. Ancott in his own turn starts to his feet, and he looks down at her for a moment.

"Where were you born?"

"I was picked up on the ocean."

"I should say so."

The eminently respectable member of em-

KATE : A COMEDY

inently respectable society turns away, scratching his head in utter bewilderment. Even the old and trustworthy word, "Ruin," guardian of domestic purity in the eminently respectable centuries of the past, has gone astray somehow. What more could any eminently respectable member of society say to a girl? Mr. Ancott's moral vocabulary is shattered. He glances back at Bianca, then turns away again, crossing the room. Scratching his head is ineffective apparently and he rubs his chin, moving to the window and looking out. The church is still there, and this is a source of relief. He looks back again; finally walks into the room and drops upon the sofa, staring across at Bianca, who is still smiling happily.

"How old were you when they brought you to land?"

"I was a baby. Did you know Captain Tom when he was alive?"

"I suppose he was the one who picked you up; was he a married man?"

"I once heard him say he had a wife—in Heaven. Are you married?"

"I am."

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

"Do you and your wife love each other?"

"Do we—well!—we—we"—

The hesitation threatens some embarrassment, but Bianca brings relief.

"Does your cat ever have kittens?"

"Our?—I don't know that our cat is eccentric."

The distant chimes from the church tower are heard; Mr. Ancott looks at his watch.

"I have twenty-one minutes to reach the last train."

"I heard Captain Tom ask a married man that question one day; and he told him if a man and woman got married without love they weren't half as good as cats; because they knew more."

The lawyer's case is apparently closed, for he remains silent.

"Dear old Captain Tom! He loved everybody and everybody loved him. It was he only that taught me all I know of what is good and evil."

"I'm afraid he had too much to do with your education, my child."

The solicitor's manner is becoming milder and there is now something almost soft in

KATE : A COMEDY

his tone. Bianca is still with her memories.

“One evening—it was the very night before he died—and I remember the chimes of the old church, just as we heard them a moment ago—he rested his hand on my head, with his dear, sweet, gentle smile, and he said that true religion was all covered by one little word—love!—and damn the rest of the Commandments.”

Mr. Ancott rises. Bianca’s face bears an expression of heavenly peace; she is looking up with a gentle smile.

“He is an angel now.”

“Is he?”

“My guardian angel! It seems to me as if he were standing behind my chair at this very moment.”

“Talking to me through your lips. It does begin to seem like that. These ideas never came from your own little head; I can almost see him myself—behind your chair.”

Has the shrewdness of a lawyer come back to him?—and is there a purpose in his mind? He looks steadily across the room over the girl and beyond the chair she is sitting in.

Bianca turns slowly and looks up over her

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

shoulder, then quietly drops her head, looking down. With the faded gray figures in the tapestry it would be hard to say what else may be in the dimly lighted room; and the sensitive girl, with all her nerves aroused, might almost imagine that some moonlit figure had wandered in from the veranda.

"These are not your own ideas, Miss Dunn; and I do not purpose to argue any longer with a dead man."

He walks across to her.

"Captain Tom loved everybody, you say. Did he ever tell you it was wrong to bring those we love to misery and ruin and pauperdom?"

The girl looks up at him with a sharp, quick movement.

"Misery!—and ruin!"

"Do you love Archibald Pengrue?"

"Do I—love!—Archibald?"

"You are a danger to him."

"A danger! I often think of that; but I try not to."

Rising.

"I love him!"

"You are bringing him to ruin. Even if

KATE : A COMEDY

he does not yield to his own infatuation the woman he has promised to marry may discover the truth at any moment; and if this union with a rich American fails Archibald and his family will come to utter misery. I do not exaggerate. It is a literal fact. I am solicitor of this family and know of what I speak. I am telling you the simple truth. Captain Tom told you that true religion is all covered by the one little word—love! Do you think he would advise you now to leave Thrummock Hall as soon as possible, or to remain here?

He turns his head slowly and looks over the back of the empty chair, with more sense of a presence there, it may be, than a man like him would be willing to admit.

“I will leave you and the old sailor together. Consult with him, my child.”

He glances hastily at his watch.

“Good-bye.”

“Good-bye, sir.”

The man of law walks straight across the room and out at the door, leaving the girl alone with the scattered lights and the shadows and faded tapestry. Her heart seems to be gather-

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

ing blood, not sending it out through her body, and she stands looking—where?—backward into herself. Then she turns away from herself and starts as if she saw something beyond the chair. She drops upon her knees. The chair has become a *prie-dieu*; but only for a moment. The girl throws up her head and springs to her feet; then hurries through the room and out at the long window to the veranda.

Silence again; not even the flutter of a curtain, for the October night is very quiet; and perfect stillness everywhere, except on the water of the river, seen in the uncertain glimmer of moonlight and then gone, as it hurries by at the foot of the Park.

“So Ffolliet has gone to pay another visit of condolence to Lady Sinjon-Glyn; he’s been there, with the ducal mamma, every evening for the last week.”

Archibald is speaking to his clerical friend, as they stroll in through the bay window.

“Ffolliet remarked as he was going that the young widow is an ‘angel of purity.’ ”

“Lady Sin!”

“So she is; her own kind of an angel and

KATE : A COMEDY

her own kind of purity. Between you and me, it looks as if she had been saving your brother, Ffolliet, from himself."

"M-m. Fannie saved me from myself once."

"So she did me—twice; and *she's* never in the slightest danger."

"Ffol doesn't know it's a habit she has."

Archibald turns and stands in the long French window, looking out, the smoke of his cigar floating upward undisturbed. His companion drops into a chair at the table.

"No man who knows Lady Sin long enough has ever doubted her ultimate virtue; but it isn't on the surface. What a contrast, Archibald, to your own sweet cousin, Dorothea!—a modest woman in her full armor."

Archibald turns from the window and drops into a chair at the table.

"I have never seen you so attentive to Dorothea as you were to-night, Jack."

"I know her now so much better than I ever did before. During my recent illness she watched at my bedside patiently and devotedly, hour after hour and day after day. Her devotion was that of a saint. I can see my own future at last as the honest rector

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

of this parish. I shall have a counsellor and a friend; a companion to guide me."

"I congratulate you, Jack, on marrying the woman you love."

"My feeling for Dorothea will be something better than love—no—not better than that; nothing is; but it will be the higher love—I shall worship her! Never once during my illness—that is, except at night, of course—the trained nurse watched me then—never once—in the daytime—did I open my eyes—half awake and half-dreaming—that Dorothea was not watching at my bedside like a Sister of Charity doing her appointed duty. I don't mean that, either; there is something about the word 'duty' that I don't like. I ought to like it. But I don't. It was something better than 'duty' with Dorothea. One evening—the day they gave me up"—

"You had a pretty close call."

"The crisis was past. Yet there was still a question whether it had left me strong enough to live through the night. The only thing I was fully conscious of that evening was—that Dorothea was leaning over me. I have never known her till now."

KATE : A COMEDY

A distant alarm is heard; a whistle, followed by a call. Archibald starts up and listens.

“That is Peeler Dimp’s alarm.”

“I remember that signal well; ‘Saturday night and another fight,’ I suppose. You and I used to run down to the river, Archibald, to be in it ourselves. The Duke would give us a guinea apiece next morning for our black eyes; and tell us to earn more guineas. Dorothea!”

He rises as Dorothea comes in, dressed for an evening walk and for duty.

“John! Did we not hear a signal, just now, from the policeman?”

“The usual Saturday night row among the drunken mill-hands.”

The whistle and call outside in the distance is repeated. Archibald strolls out upon the veranda quietly and disappears.

“Poor degraded creatures! Mr. Lyell and I are going down to the meeting at Tow Path Bill’s cottage of those who have been saved from the jaws of sin.”

“You must let me steal one moment from your good work, for I can’t go with you.”

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

Lord John moves to her with tenderness in his manner and takes her hand in his own.

"I have been talking with Archibald about your devoted care when I was ill, darling."

"It was my duty, John."

"Duty! I admire that word, dear; it is my duty to admire it. It was the duty of a Christian woman. But there is a—a certain chill in the word."

"Chill, John?—in the word 'duty'?"

"We are to be husband and wife; and I have a confession to make to you. I used to feel that you did everything and said everything from a sense of duty, and it sent a shiver down my back now and then."

"John!"

"I am confessing. I hardly dare go on, but I will. I learned one evening while I was ill that something more than 'duty'—more sacred than that—was guiding you."

"More sacred than duty?"

"Love!"

"It is one of our highest duties, John, to love one another."

"Y-e-s. But there is a difference, you

KATE : A COMEDY

know, between the word ‘love’ in the catechism and in the marriage service. I thought at first you hardly comprehended that difference; but I was deceived. You remember that day when the physician gave up my life; he even told me that I must be prepared for the next world.”

“I asked him to do that; it was our duty.”

“Heaven knows I needed the warning.”

“We all do.”

“On the evening of that day—it is a shame for me to let you know the truth—but I was not asleep as you thought I was.”

“You mean when I was obliged to leave you for the night? We feared that you were not yourself; you were hardly conscious. The nurse was instructed to send us warning, at the Hall, if there was the slightest sign of immediate danger.”

“Come dear—be seated a moment.”

He leads her to the sofa and sits near her, still holding one of her hands in his own.

“I was neither asleep nor unconscious, as you will see. A little while after you had gone the nurse herself left the room for a moment; and then—then—you stole quietly back into

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

my room through the shadows of the night lamp."

She turns slowly and looks at him.

"It was almost dark and you had put on your veil. You crept to my bedside again, lifted the veil just high enough and—I was not sleeping you see; you bent over me and pressed your lips to mine."

She draws away her hand from his; but he seizes it again.

"I was awake! You vanished from the room, but I knew, at last, you really loved me. My life had nearly died out like a flickering fire. My heart was hardly beating. You brought a medicine the doctor had not counted on. But I quite understand your hesitation to acknowledge the truth. You had never before confessed even to yourself, much less to me, all that love meant to you. It was a revelation; perhaps you feared there was something too earthly in such a love, and you dare not accept the whole truth even now. But the touch of your lips—pressed tightly and burning"—

"Tightly and"—

"Yes, dear—burning!—on mine. It shot

KATE : A COMEDY

living fire through my own body—almost cold then—I was alive again!"

She rises, stately and dignified, moving away from him.

"It was that kiss that saved my life."

"Mr. Lyell should be here by this time."

"Are you angry with me, dear?—rightly, perhaps; it was a brutal thing to tell you I was awake and conscious. But—"

"It was not I."

"Eh? It"—

The Reverend Lord John Vernor rises. There are moments in life when the sitting posture becomes utterly impossible; science has never credited the legs with their full responsibility in the expression of human emotion.

"I wonder if I heard your last remark correctly, Dorothea?"

"It was not I."

"It certainly wasn't the trained nurse."

He turns into the bay window and stands almost like a dizzy man; one of those vertigo-moments in full health when the mind ceases to control the body and concentrates its hopeless attention on jumbled and rapidly

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

changing lantern-slides in the brain. He tries to grasp an elusive thought; his hand at his brow, then extended at arms length, as if an idea were alternately passing away and coming back again.

“ You did not honor us at dinner to-night, Miss Hardenbeck.”

The mental vertigo ceases for a moment as Lord John turns and sees two very dignified women face to face and looking straight into each other’s eyes; both of them perfectly courteous, but neither of them smiling.

“ I was obliged to send my apologies to the Duchess, Miss Catherst.”

Miss Hardenbeck bows to Lord John, whose bow in return is as quiet and as cold as her own. Bailey comes in.

“ Mr. Lyell is here, Miss Catherst.”

Dorothea bows to Kate, crosses the room and goes out to the hall. The servant follows her.

Lord John has returned to oblivion so far as the present is concerned; but now and then the blank expression of his face gives way to another expression and he seems to be living over again a scene of the past. If he were

KATE : A COMEDY

not so entirely ignoring her Kate might feel herself an intruder, but she stands quietly and watches him. At last:—

“Lord John!”

“Eh?—Oh!—pardon me—I—I was—thinking.”

“Some beautiful thought for a sermon. I trust it will not be lost, and I’m sorry to interrupt you.”

“Only an elusive memory; if it *is* a memory. During my recent illness my mind was wandering they tell me. Curious!—how impossible it is to distinguish between what is real—and—and the mere fancies of the brain.”

A pause.

“Pardon me again, Miss Hardenbeck; I am still gathering cobwebs.”

“This is our first meeting since your accident!”

“Yes; except—my brain was sometimes clear when I was ill, and”—

“You remember, I see: Dorothea allowed me to relieve her at your bedside now and then. Your mind was so unsettled that I imagined”—

“I did get things mixed.”

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

"Yes—you did."

"And they are mixed now."

"You sometimes referred to Dorothea as 'Lady Betty' and you called me 'Fannie' now and then. The trained nurse told us you once addressed her as 'Your Grace,' and you tapped her under the chin."

"Was I so wild as that?"

"One day, we—we all thought you were—you were—dying."

"I was; and something brought me back to life. The blood shot through my veins again—sudden and warm and strong."

He forgets her presence again and she watches him quietly; but only for a few seconds. Her clear, cool voice brings him back to himself just in the instant apparently when he has finally grasped that elusive memory, his arm extended and his eye gleaming.

"This is my first opportunity, Lord John, to thank you for the great service you did me; I might have fallen over the rocks."

"Don't mention it."

Kate drops into an armchair and Lord John moves across to the sofa opposite.

KATE : A COMEDY

"The Duchess informed me at dinner this evening, Miss Hardenbeck, that you and your parents are expecting to leave Thrummock Hall immediately."

"To-morrow morning."

"I trust you will have a pleasant voyage."

"Thank you. The month of October is apt to be a stormy one on the ocean, but we have made the passage so often we shall hardly mind it."

"Archibald tells me he will go over next May."

"He hopes you will accompany him to New York. We have settled on a date in June for our wedding."

"He has asked me to go with him; we have been close friends for many years. But—but Miss Catherst and I have arranged to be married about the same time or before perhaps; and my professional engagements may detain me in Pengrue-Catherst. You—take an early train in the morning, I understand?"

"Before daylight; to catch the steamer-train in London at Charing Cross Station for Southampton. We must say good-bye to-night."

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

"Yes; to-night."

Both are silent for a moment. Those uncertain memories seem to be stealing back into Lord John's brain. Kate reclines in the armchair regarding him quietly and calmly.

Archibald strolls in from the veranda.

"I walked down as far as the river, Jack. The fight is all over if there was one."

"The fight?—Oh—yes—I remember."

"Everything is quiet and not a human being in sight."

Bailey appears on the veranda and throws back the curtains of the high window, opens the closed side of the casement and then crosses the room. The others turn and look at him. He throws back the portieres also of the archway leading to the further apartment.

"What is this for, Bailey?"

Mr. Edward Lyell steps in at the window and stops suddenly, seeing the others.

"Mr. Lyell will tell you, my lord."

The clergyman, pale but calm, speaks very quietly.

"I trust you will not be nervous, Miss Hardenbeck; nothing very serious, I assure

KATE : A COMEDY

you. Atleast—the danger is entirely over now.”

“Danger?”

The Earl Catherst has started suddenly towards the window; Lyell raises his arm, checking him.

“Do not disturb her, my lord!”

“It is Bianca!”

“Do not disturb her! She has fallen asleep on the way here. We met the policeman and Tow Path Bill carrying her up the hill. Dr. Cameron had responded to the signal and he assured us that there is nothing more to fear.”

Kate:—

“Bianca Dunn! An accident, Mr. Lyell?”

“She was walking at the edge of the river apparently where the rocks are wet and slippery, under the shadows of the trees.”

Kate moves to the window and looks out, but turns back quickly to Mr. Lyell’s side, speaking under her breath with nervous intensity:—

“Are you sure it was an accident? She loves you, Mr. Lyell, as few men in the world have ever been loved before; as you will never be loved again. I trust this *was* an accident.”

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

Dorothea comes in, followed by a rough mill-hand carrying Bianca in his arms. She is in a flowing coarse sheet, and her head rests on the man's shoulder; her sweet young face is next to his. She is sleeping gently. The man has shaggy eye-brows, a low forehead, jaws and mouth intended by Nature to bite and tear; a face still discolored by drink and horrible; the face of an evil brute rather than a man. There is a strange contrast between the two faces as Tow Path Bill moves across the room with the light burden in his great arms. Dorothea leads the way, serene and beautiful; they disappear. Kate again speaks to Lyell under her breath.

“Do not throw such a love as hers away! There is nothing else so great in all the world; nothing that can take its place in life for any of us. Bianca!”

She moves across the room and follows them out. Archibald has been dumb and still, with his head dropped and hardly daring to raise his eyes; now, in a whisper:—

“The doctor said there was nothing more to fear?”

“Nothing; she was rescued in time.”

KATE : A COMEDY

“What happened, Lyell?”

“Peeler Dimps can tell you more than I can.”

Lord John:—

“Tell us what you know of this matter, Dimps.”

No one has been conscious of the Law's representative until this moment, but Peeler Dimps stands in the window at the edge of the veranda. He now steps forward.

“It was this way, Lord John.”

“We heard your alarm.”

“I was along the river, standin' by the 'and rail and bein' Saturday night and I bein' sober I was feelin' lonely, my lord, and lookin' down into the water; and I saw somethin' white floatin' by out in the stream. That was the time as I gave the alarm, my lord; and when Tow Path Bill climbed out o'the river with the girl in his arms”—

“He rescued her.”

“'E allus does, my lord; and it's lucky 'e was 'ome from prison; but 'e was swearin' most 'orrible. You see 'is prayer meetin' 'ad been h'interrupted, Lord John. H'omittin' 'is exact words”—

“Don't omit anything!”

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

“ ‘E said ‘ed be dommed if ‘ed pull any more dommed people out o’ that dommed river and be dommed to ‘em, your Reverence. Then he said ‘Amen the Lord forgive him ‘ere I be swearin’ like a sinner and me a Christian lamb Amen.’ The doctor ‘ad ‘eard my signal and ‘e brought ‘er to, like; and Mrs. Grouter came out o’ the cottage with a sheet and we brought ‘er up ‘ere, my lord; and that’s h’all I can tell you, my lord.”

“ You know of course, Dimps, where the kitchen of Thrummock Hall is, and you may tell the butler not to forget Tow Path Bill. I am speaking for the Earl.”

Archibald himself has sunk into a chair by the table and his face is in his hands.

“ Thank you, Lord Jack—I mean, Lord John.”

The Law turns to its new duties and disappears through the window.

Edward Lyell moves slowly to the table and stands looking down at Archibald.

“ Earl Catherst! I will tell you something more of this. I was walking up the hill by Bianca’s side, and you know too well what I may have heard from her almost uncon-

KATE : A COMEDY

scious lips. I will repeat only three words: ‘Archibald—my husband!’ ”

Lord John starts.

“Other words followed, almost inaudible; but I heard enough. Bianca Dunn should stand with you at the altar of our Holy Church, not another woman.”

Lord John can barely find his voice even to exclaim:—

“Lyell!”

“You heard the Call of the Wild again. My prayers for you both have not been answered, and we must bow to the Divine wisdom. But I will offer my prayers once more—and still offer them.”

He turns and walks away with bowed head through the window to the veranda; out among his fellow shadows. Archibald’s face is still buried in his hands, his elbows on the table. Lord John looks at him a moment in silence; and finally speaks in a firmly restrained tone:—

“Did Edward Lyell draw the right conclusion from the words that fell from Bianca’s lips?”

Archibald drops his head between his arms;

STRONGER THAN LAW OR RITE

it is his only answer. Lord John moves quickly to the table and brings his fist down upon it with a heavy blow.

"Damn it, Archibald!—I am a minister of God; and for the first time in my life I feel that I am speaking with authority from Him. Tear up that vile written contract with another woman; it is a legal insult to womanhood. Bianca has a more sacred contract. She represents God's natural law of marriage and no religious ceremony can annul her rights, be the laws of man what they may. We have been a pair of blackguards together, but you shall join me in prayer. He can hear it even from such vile lips as mine, provided it comes honestly from our two vile hearts."

Then, standing erect, his head slightly bowed, and his former partner in vice still prostrate over the table with his head between his arms, the anointed priest utters the first true prayer of his life.

"In all humility, we beg Thee that we may meet the special temptations of our class and of our rank like men; bad men, we confess, but still men. This family—august and ancient according to our worldly standards—is

KATE : A COMEDY

now face to face with the general moral law of Humanity, and the heir of its great title must now decide whether he will obey or defy Thee. Let him not dare to trifle with the laws of human love given to the race and ordained by Thee in Nature. Let us not presume to think in our vanity that we created those laws of love by our own puny statutes; or by religious ceremonies which we have formulated and ascribed to Thee. Above all!—let us not forget that man was made in Thy likeness. The transmission of that sacred image by the love of the sexes is the holiest of human functions; and so, let every man or woman, tempted to make that function serve the mean and little purposes of life, convenience or gain, ambition or family pride, recoil from sacrilege. Let not our marriage service be made a fantastic mockery; nor let the ministers at Thy altar pander to those who insult Thee and laugh. Amen.”

“Amen.”

“Our church isn’t a music hall, old man; and don’t put a vaudeville show in it. Bianca Dunn is your wife!”

ACT IV
—
WHICH
WOULD BE A WIFE?

ACT FOURTH

WHICH WOULD BE A WIFE?

AT first glance, Reginald might be mistaken for a part of the decoration of the room, a light, frail figure sitting near the mantelpiece; but it has motion. Even the mere up and down movement of one arm could be imitated in an automatic curiosity, if a cigarette between the fingers and smoke issuing at intervals from the lips did not suggest something human in its way; and the lips themselves are too pale to fulfill the ideal of an artist in wax figures.

The apartment is what may be called the general reception room, just off the entrance hall, of a very rich man's house in New York. Three low, broad steps lead up to a balustraded landing from which a wide arch opens to another room beyond; but the heavy portieres now hang closed. The portiere of the en-

KATE : A COMEDY

trance hall is drawn open. The mantelpiece and fireplace near which the semi-human figure of Reginald sits are now concealed by flowers and there are flowers everywhere else; wherever the ingenuity of a New York florist, guided evidently by someone of superior taste, can find a place to attach or suspend them or mass them in banks or wreath them over statuary or permit them to overflow the tops of exquisite vases. There are orchids which represent in their profusion many coupons yet to be detached from gilt-edged bonds in a crowded safe-deposit vault; festoons of roses, a wealth of American Beauties, lilies and clusters of white chrysanthemums.

“Regie!”

“Bert!”

A newcomer has strolled in from the hall with the incidental, uninterested manner of certain young New Yorkers; *blasé* long before his time; a very different young man from the little cigarette smoker near the mantel; quite as frail in his figure, but lithe; indeed a much larger man might do well to wait until further dissipation had weakened him hopelessly, if he desired to test his physical

WHICH WOULD BE A WIFE?

possibilities. He has thin cheeks and a dark color about the eyes, as if from late nights and worse; but the eyes themselves are keen even under drowsy lids falling over them. He swings about in the centre of the room and surveys the decorations.

"Not bad. De Peyster Wolfe here?"

"M-m."

"Any of the women?"

"Some."

A servant appears and throws back the portieres of the wide opening, discovering the music room beyond, also magnificently decorated; and a special canopy of flowers within it proclaims a wedding. There are colored windows on the opposite side of this room through which the light of a bright June day is shining.

Four beautiful young women are chatting in a group, in the music room; all in *mousseline de soie*, Louis XVI—embroidered revers; Marie Antoinette *toques* of velvet, and *aigrettes*; souvenirs in diamonds. Being all in the same costume they are all bridesmaids, of course. Two of them glance up, seeing Herbert, and give him a toss of the hand. He raises his

KATE : A COMEDY

own hand and dips it jauntily. Then all four of the young beauties look up in another direction, rise and disappear. Someone—important—has evidently entered another part of the music room. Herbert turns to his companion.

“See the church yet?”

“M-m. You?”

“No; just up. Supper.”

“Lottie?”

“Cora. You skipped.”

“Dan Macy’s.”

“Lose much?”

“Ten thousand.”

“How does the church look?”

“Flowers. Ribbons.”

“Crowd, of course.”

“Mob.”

“Same old thing; your wedding next week.”

“M-m. Bore.”

“Deadly. My wedding is off.”

“M-m.”

Two more bridesmaids are shown in by the servant and mount the steps to the music room. Reginald rises and bows languidly. The bridesmaids return the bow and dis-

WHICH WOULD BE A WIFE?

appear. Herbert has watched them with interest, and he now looks at Reginald.

“Who the devil?”—

“San Francisco.”

“Oh!”

Mr. de Peyster Wolfe steps in from the music room and stops a moment upon the landing as he sees the young men.

“Herbert! I was afraid you wouldn’t turn out in time.”

“I gave my man definite instructions when I tumbled into bed to bathe me and dress me and put me in the brougham. He waked me up at the door, here.”

“Regie!—you’re standing up. I put you in the chair to rest.”

Then, with a very impressive manner, but with a twinkle in his eye:—

“You and Herbert have strenuous duties before you to-day; to show the ladies to the carriages, out of them at the church, back again after the service and out of the carriages at the house. I have promoted you, Regie, for faithful services. You were the best man to lift the white ribbon in the centre aisle I’ve ever had—since I first put on the

KATE : A COMEDY

cap and bells and assumed control of New York Society."

He descends to the others with steps as light as his manner, still speaking with cynical good nature. He is a man of about forty.

"This wedding is my masterpiece, boys. We've had a dozen reporters here already to assure the world of our elegant privacy, and there will probably be a feminine riot outside the church; that will impress the public with our dignified repose."

The sound of stringed instruments, tuning.

"Listen! We have classical music at the house to-day; that's a preliminary selection. But the music at the church will be a dream of Heaven—it may be the last one the bride and groom will ever have—Lohengrin to creep up the aisle with, a subdued symphony during the ceremony, *vox humana* angels will accompany the blessing, and Mendelssohn to crawl out by. All the composers have omitted the third great wedding march—to the divorce court. Join the women, Regie."

"You—you told me"—

"That they wanted to be by themselves; but they won't mind you."

WHICH WOULD BE A WIFE?

Reginald walks across the room feebly, up the steps and out into the music room.

Herbert:—

“I’ll join the girls, too.”

“That’s different.”

“I’ll protect them against Regie.”

He runs up the steps lightly; looks back.

“Those two San Francisco girls, de Peyster?”

“I’m introducing them.”

“Stunners!”

Herbert disappears. Mr. de Peyster Wolfe looks around the room with the air of a connoisseur, or rather with the air of a master in his own great art.

“William!”

The servant appears.

“You may throw open the portieres of the conservatory.”

A blaze of brilliant June light through a glass roof and many windows, with the colors of growing flowers and foliage plants and the grace of Florida palms.

“And now the hall portiere; draw it—not quite closed but almost—about—that’s it! Keep it like that after we have returned from the church—just enough to show a glimpse

KATE : A COMEDY

of the statue and pedestal. That I think is my last touch—thank you, William."

William gives a final shake to the rich curtains, now almost closed, to shut off the entrance hall in the general effect desired by the master, and withdraws.

"De Peyster Wolfe!"

"Lady Sinjon-Glyn!"

A vision of coquettishly modified mourning; the young woman stands at the balustrade under a hat that quivers with a delicate suggestion of grief; her smile is equally subdued and almost evanescent.

"They told me you would be in New York, Fannie."

"Of course I should be; came over on the same steamer with Lord John Vernor; we only arrived last night. Pretty close thing for the bridegroom's best man, wasn't it?—and I nearly lost the wedding myself; our steamer was delayed—I wouldn't have missed it for the world. I can't appear in my official capacity as a young widow; but I'm in it all the same. I just brought the bride downstairs."

Mr. de Peyster Wolfe moves to the bal-

WHICH WOULD BE A WIFE?

ustrade. He reaches up and takes her hand.

"Lady Sin! I am delighted to know that you are here again."

"Thank you, dear. Kate is a picture; and surrounded by that sweet bevy of girls—prettiest lot of bridesmaids I ever saw—and more coming. But you *are* glad to see me. Do you mind stopping for a moment?"

"Stopping?"

"My hand."

He drops her hand and she wrings it.

"This is where you and I used to do Romeo and Juliet when the dear old Admiral left me in New York and sailed away. I can spare you a few minutes now. Wait! I'll take off my glove. What a lovely display of flowers! They still depend on you, I see, for all the pretty things and special events."

"The artistic aspirations of a weary soul."

"The Court Jester of society as usual, I suppose."

"New York always has one; I wear the motley still."

"There!"

Lady Sin lays her ungloved hand over the

KATE : A COMEDY

balustrade. He seizes it and presses it with ardor to his lips, holding it against them.

“How is your wife?”

He drops her hand and starts back, turning away from her. The question is a polite one of course, but he wasn’t expecting it at that particular moment.

“Cornelia is in Paris.”

“She and I are such dear friends. Still in Paris? I had a note from her there. Well! Are you going on, Romeo? Presently, I dare say; don’t hurry.”

She descends the steps and joins him.

“Kate looks a bit pale except a bright little flush on each cheek; quite becoming to her; but she is a bundle of nerves. She nearly fainted in her room a few moments ago.”

“Indeed!”

“Oh! don’t be alarmed—it won’t spoil your beautiful wedding. And there wasn’t the slightest cause for Kate to faint. I was merely chatting with her about the latest news in England.”

“I should be glad to hear some myself; couldn’t get over last season as usual.”

“Well—let me see; I don’t know where

WHICH WOULD BE A WIFE?

to begin. The Reverend Lord John Vernor—that's it—I'll begin with the Church—he has thrown up his profession, you know."

"So Cornelia wrote me in her last letter."

"And everybody takes it for granted he'll go into the army at last."

"I never met Lord John, but Lady Betty Arden told Cornelia his engagement was off."

"I was just telling Kate about it. The Honorable Dorothea Catherst is now helping the new rector, Dr. Lyell, in his arduous duties. In my own opinion, Dorothea has long intended to marry the Rector of Pengrue-Catherst; who he happens to be as a man is a mere incident and it doesn't interest her. When Lord John Vernor chucked the rectorship Dorothea chucked him. The Reverend Doctor Lyell will probably take her over with the parsonage and the living; and he couldn't do better. She's the most beautiful woman in the county as well as the most religious. Did Cornelia tell you about Captain Lord Ffolliet Pengrue? He has thrown up his commission in the Hussars to take orders—from the Bishop instead of the War Office."

"She wrote me something else about the Captain. You are going to marry him."

KATE : A COMEDY

"H-sh! The first year isn't up by three months. But I did tell a few women friends in strict confidence; that's the only way I've announced our engagement to the public yet. And that reminds me of Kate's fainting-spell upstairs just now. I was saying to her in a whisper that I expected to marry the Reverend Lord—it was at that very moment she toppled over into my arms. But she pulled herself out of it before I could reach for my vinaigrette and told the maid to go on with her bridal veil; then I finished the sentence—to marry the Reverend Lord Ffol-liet Pengrue. Kate burst into laughter. Her veil is a dream of beauty. I do hope she and Archibald will be as happy a pair of turtle-doves as Sir William and I were. But Archibald is dangerously young. You men are such faithful creatures—at seventy. Ffol-liet is young, but in marrying him I feel that I am taking out a love-insurance policy."

"He expects to be a missionary, I understand."

"M-m."

"And you a missionary's wife!"

"In Central Africa. I'm looking forward

WHICH WOULD BE A WIFE?

with joy to our honeymoon there. A crowd of dear little black babies around me; I'll wash 'em and he'll baptize them. I shall start a Smart Set in Central Africa."

"And get fashion plates from London, if Lord Ffolliet can persuade the black ladies to put something on. The term '*décolleté*' is the most elastic word in any language; but the African ladies have discovered its limits—the ground."

"I shall have a large field of usefulness and much to interest me as a missionary's wife in African Society. Well, Romeo, are you going on?—or shall I replace my glove?"

With a coquettish smile, raising her hand. He seizes and kisses it; then looks into her face.

"Do you think I shall be satisfied any more than Romeo himself with a mere ungloved hand?"

He extends his arm slowly, still keeping his eyes on her, and places it about her waist. She starts slightly, puts her own hand to his and holds it away, looking up half over her shoulder; speaks with deep impression:—

"Mr. Wolfe! Cornelia!"

KATE : A COMEDY

“No, you don’t!”

This sharply, and bringing up his hand before her face with the fore-finger extended.

“You don’t save me from myself again; you’ve done that three times before.”

And he turns away from her, striding across the room.

“I’ll save myself this time.”

Lady Sin bursts into a peal of laughter and swings around to the steps, running up and looking back, at the top.

“De Peyster!”

He turns and looks at her.

“Meet me in Central Africa!”

She disappears in the music room.

“I’ll be hanged if I do!”

Mr. de Peyster Wolfe gazes a moment at the vacuum she has left; then laughs heartily, but stops suddenly.

“Dear Cornelie!”

Mr. Franklin Tenbroeck steps into the room from the entrance hall.

“Mr. Wolfe!”

“Mr. Tenbroeck!”

“Has the bride come down yet?”

“Yes!”

WHICH WOULD BE A WIFE?

"I wish to see Kate. Would you kindly speak to her for me?"

"Certainly."

"Thank you—alone—here."

Mr. Wolfe moves briskly up the steps and into the music room. Franklin Tenbroeck crosses to the flower-covered fireplace and stands looking down at it without the slightest regard to its present disguise; he even turns as if warming himself, as men in deep thought usually do before fire-screens in summer.

The servant comes in from the hall, holding back the portiere and raising his arm towards the music room. Two more pretty bridesmaids enter, passing up the steps and out. Tenbroeck, still absorbed in his thoughts, recrosses the room with bowed head and with his hands clasped behind him. Mr. de Peyster Wolfe re-appears; motions as if to an unseen servant, and the huge double portieres of the music room are drawn together in front of him; except that he holds back one side with his extended hand as Kate Hardenbeck passes through the opening. He drops the portiere behind her and disappears from view.

KATE : A COMEDY

“You wished to see me, Uncle Franklin.”

“Yes, Kate.”

She stands in her full bridal costume looking down at him and she seems a Duchess already.

“Are you going to read me a loving sermon on the solemnity of marriage? Wait until we return from the church. I have been laughing with the rest of them—let me go on laughing!”

She drops her face into both her hands and sobs.

“Let me go on laughing!”

Tenbroeck walks to the steps and extends his hand upward to her.

“Kate!”

She moves down to him and her head falls upon his breast; his arm is about her.

“Before I tell you my errand here”—

“You are to be one of our bridal party.”

“I am not here for that purpose.”

She looks up at him, surprised.

“I have a very serious question to ask you, my dear girl. Do you love Archibald Pengerue?”

She controls her tears and the convulsive

WHICH WOULD BE A WIFE?

movement of her breast; then walks away from him.

"The Bishop is going to ask me that question in a few moments. My answer to it is in the prayer book, printed."

"In your heart?"

"The Bishop won't be so inquisitive. But mine is the same answer I suppose that many other girls make at the altar. Let me quote it to you from my heart: 'I am doing the most natural thing in the world for a young girl; I'm getting married; and I prefer this man to any other that has asked me to marry him. It will be my duty to take the best possible care of him and I shall do it. Perhaps I shall love him after we have been married awhile.' Half the women in the congregation will find it all in their own prayer-books, reading between the lines. For special occasions like this there is an addition to the form in the unprinted marriage-service of a girl's heart: 'This particular man is a nobleman and a fine fellow too. He will expect me to preside with dignity at his table and to decorate his home as a Countess; afterwards as a Duchess. I will do my duty.' "

KATE : A COMEDY

"You have answered my question. You do not love him."

Kate is silent and motionless.

"I will now say this: he does not love you."

"If he did love me, I should not do him the wicked wrong to marry him. We quite understand each other."

"Lord John Vernor is here with me, Kate; in another room."

She starts and stares at him; then approaches him.

"At this house? Now!"

"He came to my office and we have been closeted together."

"Go on!"

"He urged me to come here on behalf of the Earl Catherst."

"Of—of—Archibald!"

"I refused to do so; and I insisted on Lord John accompanying me himself to meet you at once. He has consented with great hesitation to deliver a message which I declined to deliver. It is for him to do so as the friend of Earl Catherst; not for me."

"A message—to me—from Archibald?"

"Yes. If you do not care to see Lord John

WHICH WOULD BE A WIFE?

I will bring him and your father together. But the message affects you more than any one else in the world and we can consult with your father afterwards. It will be for you in any case to give the final answer. Will you see Lord John Vernor?"

"Yes."

"If you wish any service from me, Kate, after you have met him, I shall be within call."

He steps to her side and takes her hand.

"But from this moment you are a young girl no longer. It is for a woman to decide her own future and that of another woman."

"Another woman?"

"I cannot help you."

He kisses her forehead and turns away, passing out to the entrance hall. Kate moves a step forward, gazing intently after him. She listens and waits.

Lord John Vernor comes into the room and stops near the entrance, facing Kate. The clerical figure she has remembered is not before her; she has never seen this fashionably dressed man arrayed for a wedding and looking at her quietly through a single glass. He seems almost a stranger to her. They bow

KATE : A COMEDY

with a courtesy abnormally calm and formal.

“Miss Hardenbeck!”

“Lord John Verner! Archibald is well?”

“Perfectly. He is on his way to the church,
I presume. I am to meet him in the vestry—
pardon me!”—

He looks at his watch.

“In fifteen minutes. I trust you will forgive my intrusion here at such a time.”

“Mr. Tenbroeck said you came with hesitation and at his own request; after his refusal to deliver a message himself—from Archibald to me.”

“It is certainly my duty, not Mr. Tenbroeck’s.”

“What is the message?”

“The Earl Catherst cannot go on with the ceremony”—

“How! He—he cannot”—

“I don’t mean that—you misunderstood me—it is only my awkwardness. I’m a duffer, Miss Hardenbeck. By this time Archibald is already waiting, as I have said”—

“To meet me at the chancel.”

“Yes.”

“Well?—well!”

WHICH WOULD BE A WIFE?

“But he feels, as I intended to say, that he cannot go on unless you shall first know certain facts; and the rest will lie strictly with you. Justice to you, he thinks, to say nothing of other motives, compels him to this course. To be quite frank, he became nearly wild this morning, almost beside himself, and he compelled me to promise him that you should know the whole truth before you stood at the altar with him. I am complying with his request because I also think it is just, both to you and to another.”

“Be seated.”

“Thank you!”

They both sit.

“Justice to me—and to another woman—Mr. Tenbroeck spoke of her.”

“You remember there was a young girl at Thrummock Hall last September, a companion of the Duchess of Mannerton.”

“Bianca Dunn; of course. I was much interested in her. I did hope she and the Reverend Mr. Lyell”—

“Doctor Lyell is absorbed in his work: assisted by Miss Catherst.”

“Lady Sinjon-Glyn told me, this evening,

KATE : A COMEDY

that you and Miss Dorothea Catherst had”—

“Miss Catherst expressed to me the opinion that our union would not be conducive to the welfare of the parish. It was her duty.”

“Mr. Lyell, then, has finally deserted Bianca. Do you think the girl entirely recovered from the terrible accident that night when she fell into the river? We left Thrummock Hall very early the next morning, you know.”

“It was not an accident.”

“I guessed that.”

“It was Bianca’s own wild effort under the impulse of the moment to escape from the intolerable position in which she stood; between the Earl Catherst and yourself.”

Kate springs to her feet. She puts her hand to her head as if dazed.

“The Earl Catherst!—and—and—me?”

“The relations between them had been those of man and wife.”

She starts slightly and looks at him; rigid.

“Duffer again, Miss Hardenbeck. I intended to get up to that gradually.”

“And this is his message to me.”

“No. I am coming to that.”

“You—you have more than that to tell me?”

WHICH WOULD BE A WIFE?

"Archibald offered his hand in marriage at her bedside that night."

"I see. He was right. That is his message."

"No. I haven't got to that yet."

"For Heaven's sake!"—

"One moment, please."

The single glass has dropped and the etiquette of that curious disc is its careful readjustment before proceeding with any subject. Lord John wipes it slowly and returns it to his eye. His revived military hopes may have made him more deliberate in speech.

"Pray go on!"

"Bianca refused the offer."

"Indeed!"

"For the same reason that the—the 'accident'—occurred; she would not stand in his way. The next day she disappeared utterly."

"Bianca disappeared!"

"Every effort to find where she had gone failed. Not to her native country, so far as we could discover; and we were forced to believe at last that she was dead; all of us except the old Duke."

"Poor little girl!"

KATE : A COMEDY

Then, with a sudden thought, Kate faces him.

“You knew the truth that night?”

“Yes.”

“And neither you nor Archibald thought it necessary to inform me—then or since.”

“Why should we?”

“Exactly;—why should you? You have simply let me go on with our marriage contract.”

“Why not?”

“Oh!—I understand.”

“You did not love him.”

“And you despised me; you had told me that already.”

Lord John does not speak.

“I understand. Why indeed should you give a second thought to a creature like me? I know now what utter contempt for me you felt. A woman without a soul!”

She sinks into a chair, her head falling over between her arms; catches her breath a moment, and sobs at last convulsively.

“Kate!”

“You despise me still! I could bear it then, but I cannot bear it now.”

“Forgive me!”

WHICH WOULD BE A WIFE?

He rises and moves to her, looking down at her as she goes on in broken tones:—

“I am weak; crushed by all the suffering I have had—and to-day I am frightened. All pride has gone away from me; I cannot even be angry with you. You have a right to despise me now; but don’t tell me so to-day—don’t tell me!—I cannot bear it. I met your contempt with anger then. I asked you to hate me; and I—I thought for a little while—only for a little while, that I was hating you. I thought I hated you until that day when they told me you were dying.”

“Until that day! You were at my bedside.”

“With Dorothea; yes.”

“Only with her?”

Silence.

“A haunting fancy of that evening has never left me; it comes back to me—at any time—day or night: I start suddenly—and think. The more I try to think, the more surely the will-o-the-wisp eludes me.”

“You may think what you please about me now. All pride is gone.”

“Tell me the honest truth!”

KATE : A COMEDY

'I could not bear the thought that you should pass away—forever!—without"—

"It was you that started the warm blood through my veins that night! I know now, Kate! It was not delirium! I could never separate that wonderful moment from my other fancies—but I know now! It was the pressure of your lips on mine that brought me back to life."

"It was I that kissed you, John. You see how weak I am to-day. You may despise me now."

"I lied when I told you I despised you, Kate."

She looks up at him with a quick, sharp motion of the head.

"I lied to you meanly; as a strong man can lie to the woman he loves; and only to her."

"To the—the woman he loves!"

She raises her arms to him; he seizes them.

"I was defending myself against my own heart; and I have lost the fight."

"The woman you love!"

Lifting herself towards him.

"Loved since I first looked into your eyes, Kate!"

WHICH WOULD BE A WIFE?

“At one of the open gates”—

“The flames of Hell were shining in my face then; it is Heaven’s own light that shines on me now—from *your* face, dear.”

Bringing her to his breast. Their lips press tightly; then her head drops, as if love too long suppressed had overpowered her.

“I have suffered as well as you, Kate; but we’re not suffering just now, dear, are we?”

“Suffering!”

She laughs gently and nestles her head more closely to his neck. He raises his hand to stroke her head tenderly—suddenly pauses; then lifts a spray from her veil.

“Orange blossoms!”

Kate springs up, turning away from him with a startled look.

“That is the way I am delivering a message from my dearest friend—he’s waiting for me at the church. The message is still unfinished.”

“Tell me!”

“When I arrived last evening in our belated steamer, Archibald was not at the pier to meet me, nor at the hotel. In the room assigned to me, I found a cable-despatch from the Duke of Mannerton lying on a desk, and a

KATE : A COMEDY

single line from Archibald lay beside it—‘This will tell you where to find me.’ You know how much the old Duke loved Bianca Dunn.”

“Yes.”

“He had never given up his efforts, and his despatch to Archibald told him where Bianca had been found at last by his agents; among poor foreigners in New York, Greeks and Syrians and other unhappy creatures in dire poverty. The Duke’s message ended with the words; ‘Take all odds offered on my horse at Sandown.’ I hurried into a carriage and drove to the place indicated in the cable. It was in a wretched district of this great city; but you wouldn’t know it.”

“The lower east side.”

“I dare say.”

“I know the poverty there too well.”

“I found a room at last, for the direction was minute. The old Duke hadn’t saved words. His son, the Earl Catherst, heir of the dukedom, was sitting beside a broken bed with a thin, pale hand in his own.”

“Poor Bianca!”

“She was smiling happily. A new-born child lay upon the pillow by her face.”

WHICH WOULD BE A WIFE?

Kate turns quickly with a step towards him.
“That is my message.”

She sinks into a chair and looks straight before her.

‘Archibald insisted that you should know the truth if you met him at the steps of the altar to-day.’

“If we should kneel together at the chancel-rail! The blessing of the Church would rest upon our union and Bianca Dunn would be lying in her bed with his child by her side. Which of us two women would be his wife?”

“God alone can tell us that. His answer will be in the hearts of men some day. Let the Church be silent and listen: the Law may close its book and wait.”

“In His eyes!”

Kate rises with upraised arms.

“Which would be a wife?—and which of us would be his mistress?—in the eyes of God!”

“Is the bride ready?”

Mr. de Peyster Wolfe has reappeared, and the heavy curtains roll back from the great arch of the music room.

“I am quite ready.”

KATE : A COMEDY

“William!”

The servant enters from the hall. Kate:—

“Say to Mr. Tenbroeck that I wish to see him.”

“And draw open the hall portiere, please, William.”

Mr. de Peyster Wolfe now signals back into the music room. There is sudden harmony from string and reeds. Lady St. John-Glyn comes in and walks down with Mr. Wolfe. Herbert and Reginald, leading the bridesmaids, move through the arch and are descending the steps. Maid-servants appear from a side door watching with interest. Mr. Tenbroeck has walked in from the hall and he looks inquiringly across to Kate. Old Mr. Hardenbeck and the sweet little “Mother” appear after the bridesmaids.

“Stop!”

Everybody turns and looks at Kate; half of the bridesmaids still on the steps or leaning over the balustrade. She crosses the room to her friend.

“Mr. Tenbroeck! Will you take a message for me to the Earl Catherst, at the church?”

He inclines his head gravely.

WHICH WOULD BE A WIFE?

"You have decided."

"I wish him and the future Duchess of Mannerton long life and much happiness; she is waiting for him elsewhere. There will be no wedding to-day."

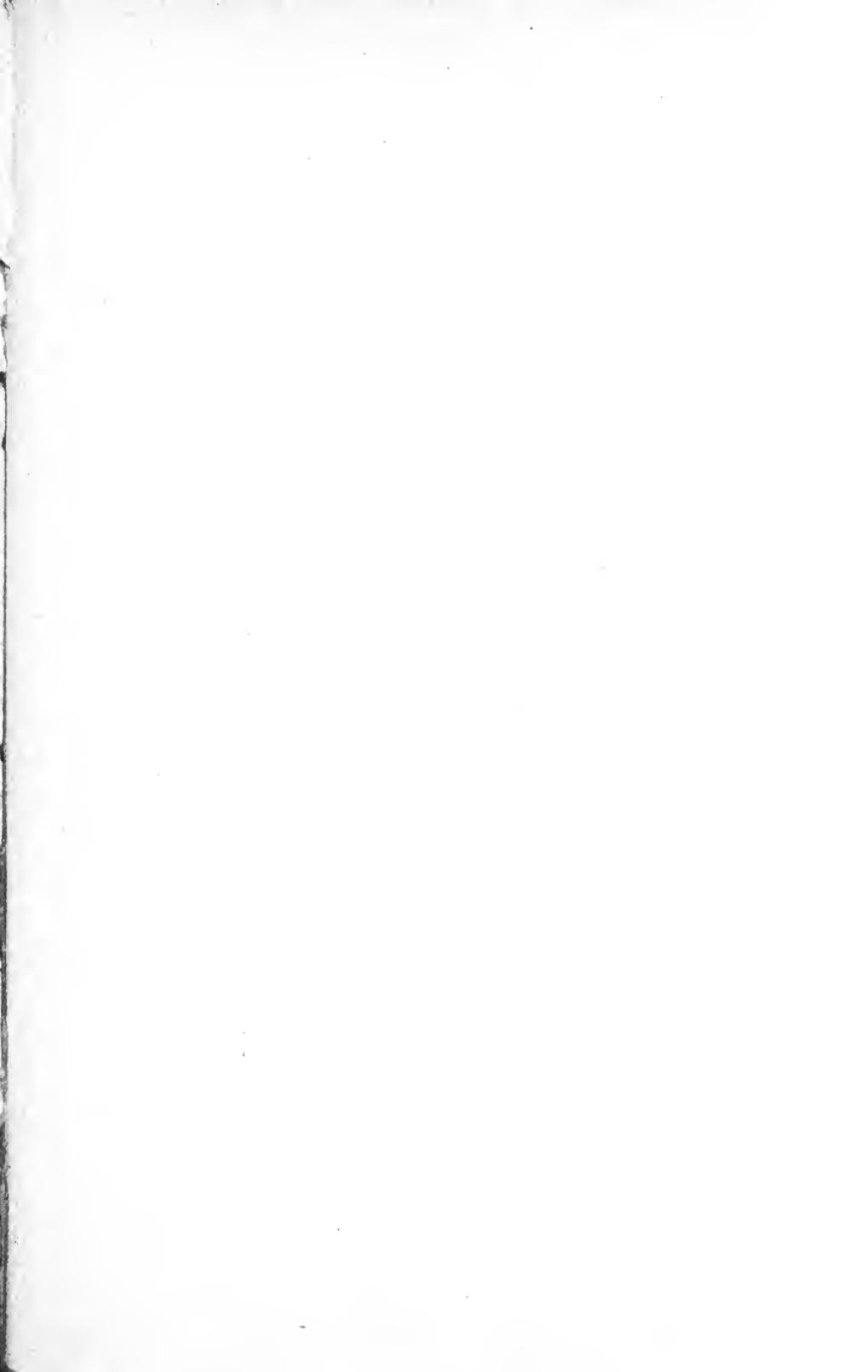
All are startled and show general astonishment. Kate looks with a smile at Lord John.

"Well—by thunder!—Mother!"

Mrs. Hardenbeck's head is buried in her husband's ample breast.

"The more a man sees of his own daughter the less he knows about girls."

THE END





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